TELOS

NUMBER 123 Spring 2002

Articles:

Theology, Authority, and Democracy
John Milbank

Friendship and Philosophy in Plato
Catherine Pickstock

On Relationality
Mary-Jane Rubenstein

Wagner and the Trajectory of German Philosophy
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Botwinick: Does the Bible Legitimate Israeli Settlements?

Klitsche de la Grange: On Italy

Hodges and Pynes: On Plato's *Republic*

Hughes and Bullimore: What is Radical Orthodoxy?

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Introduction

This issue continues to explore the engagement of Critical Theory with religion. Hughes and Bullimore present a cogent summary of the project of Radical Orthodoxy launched by a group of British theologians seeking to integrate continental philosophy, an otherwise hopelessly staid Christian theology, and radical politics, culminating in a new version of Christian socialism. Milbank provides a detailed elaboration of the intellectual and historical underpinnings of this position, and the relation between Radical Orthodoxy's idiosyncratic Christianity and democracy.

Begun in 1996 (#107), *Telos*' engagement with religion in general and this theological current in particular has run counter to predispositions of most American intellectuals, who have long since relegated religion to the dustbin of history, or at least to a hermetically sealed private sphere. This discussion of religion, however, has nothing to do with the possibility of religion as such, but explores the Judeo-Christian background which has indisputably defined Western culture. What is at stake is the claim that there is a particular Western tradition with theological roots that remain relevant even in the context of secularization. This rediscovery of the *specificity* of a Western identity — especially following 9/11 — emerges out of a rejection of an abstract universalism which, combining certain Enlightenment paradigms with the logic of bureaucracy, has tended to eviscerate the Western cultural heritage.

Radical Orthodoxy provides a critique of modernity and alienation, which reverses Critical Theory's original account of alienation and religion (strarted by Feuerbach), by claiming that it is liturgy that provides the effective alternative to a modernity gone haywire. In so doing, Radical Orthodoxy moves the discussion close to issues traditionally associated with Critical Theory. But is it effective? It is not immediately obvious that Milbank's erudite account will persuade many non-theological readers. Christian theology may lead to a critique of modernity, but is it really necessary? In the end, it may not bridge the gap between theological and non-theological thought, but it may succeed in drawing attention to the wealth of theological resources, from patristic writings to the *nouvelle théologie* of Henri de Lubac, available for a critical analysis of modernity.

Nonetheless, the particular politics of Radical Orthodoxy are troublesome and do not necessarily follow from their theological premises. Radical Orthodoxy has not proven that, as Christian politics, its soft Christian socialism is more credible than, e.g., the politics of right-wing fundamentalism, liberation theology, or, for that matter, a rejection of politics on the pretext of separating religion and politics. Despite all the theological rhetoric, in the end the political conclusions are hardly different from standard left-liberalism. Even more problematic, to the extent that Radical Orthodoxy insists on the centrality of a *particular* Christian liturgy, it leaves unanswered the question of alternative religions — especially non-Western ones such as Islam.

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A more credible joining of theology — albeit negative theology — and politics is provided by Botwinick in his devastating critique of right-wing theological justifications for Israel's expansionist policies. Through a careful reading of biblical texts, based on standard orthodox Jewish sources, he demonstrates that no univocal injunctions can be drawn from the Bible and that, given its terminally metaphorical nature, it ends up all a matter of interpretation, political negotiations, and educated guesses as to what it all means and what it entails. In such a tendentially arbitrary predicament threatening to deteriorate into nihilism and opportunism, the only solid guide remains that same tradition that has already shaped personal identity and social institutions. In addition to delegitimating particular right-wing Israeli claims of divine groundings for expanding settlements deep into Palestinian territories, Botwinick's negative-theological analysis throws doubt on *all* claims of the kind, first and foremost those of Islamic and other religious fundamentalists pretending to have direct access to God's will. Such an approach paves the way for a plurality of equally valid interpretations of sacred texts and, to the extent that these various theological constructions generate diverse cultural traditions, it provides solid foundations for a *genuine* multiculturalism predicated on federal arrangements — unlike today's fashionable liberal multiculturalism which, under the pretense of tolerating otherness, subsumes all cultural frameworks within a *particular* system (Western liberal-democracy) unwarrantedly hypostasized to the level of universality.

Other articles by Radical Orthodox scholars, such as Pickstock and Rubenstein, discuss the implications of concepts as diverse as "friendship" and "the gift" to vindicate their theological grounding against fashionable postmodern interpretations, primarily those of Derrida. A similar critique is carried out by Moran concerning deconstruction as a whole, while Mack traces anti-Semitic features in German idealist tradition in general, and Wagner in particular. In attempting, unsuccessfully, to salvage some sort of "ethics of exception" out of the work of Simmel and Lacan, Morris-Reich unintendedly documents the bankruptcy of 20th century thought in reconstructing ethics outside of any traditional horizons. Morris-Reich's conclusion that both Simmel's vindication of "life" as such in a context of generalized alienation, and Lacan's meandering into the crevices of a fictitious unconscious to discover the impossibility of fulfillment, lead nowhere, and that decision is ultimately a function of the *telos*, does not help much in grounding ethics. The *telos* cannot be left as an arbitrary construct. As Schmitt, whom Morris-Reich misreads, pointed out, both the *telos* and decisions have nothing to do with individual egos, but are ultimately rooted in *concrete orders* — pre-existing traditions and customs — which provide direction and meaning. As long as modernity insists on a radical break with tradition, the result will inevitably by nihilism and confusion — a predicament that a postmodern reintroduction of theological concerns may very well help to alleviate.

Russell A. Berman and Paul Piccone

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The Last of the Last: Theology, Authority, and Democracy

John Milbank

I

Should theology owe its prime allegiance to the academic community or to the church? Should it be, as David Tracy advocates, primarily a "public discourse" answerable to the critical norms and liberal values, or should it be the faith of the Church seeking understanding according to a logic inseparable from this faith, as encouraged by Joseph Ratzinger?

Faced with such a stark alternative, the tendency is to propose a compromise. Given that the notion of a contextless reason without presuppositions and practical commitments is a fiction (as recent philosophy has come to conclude), then it is not contrary to reason to suggest that a well-established community may undertake to articulate its own implicit reasonings. However, if this reflection is not to be merely self-regarding, then it must also be subject to critical reflections from external sources, sources such as the diagnosis of "ideologies."

Yet, the problem with any mere compromise is that it produces a double problem and compounds it with contradiction. One is still left with the question of an uncritical solipsism and of the fictional perspective from nowhere. If the two are combined, then one is trying to believe at once that reason founds itself and that this is impossible. At this point, some theologians have had recourse to semi-Hegelian solutions, often inspired by Jürgen Habermas. Critique is imminent: one must begin with traditions and assumptions, but a negative process of unravelling contradictions gradually drives toward a universal *logos*.

This solution is no better. Traditions unfold by acts of hermeneutic discrimination as well as by overcoming contradictions. Something

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inherently subjective and imbued with feeling is just as involved in development as in inheritance, continuation, and origin. However long the process of formally objective logical negation, this cannot alter the positive status of the beginnings. One remains entirely inside a tradition. Conversely, if a logical process is still the only criterion for socially acceptable truth, then one is persisting with placeless, formal, and self-founded criteria for reason. The idea that a tradition will edge toward the universal through the working out of contradiction, or conversely, that a foundation will finally emerge at the conclusion, is contradictory. So one still has to compromise between two perhaps unsatisfactory positions, which sustains the unsatisfactoriness of both and adds to this the unacceptability of downright incoherence.

Is it possible to do any better? Very often, documents issued in the name of joint doctrinal statements among various churches produce their results by toning down given differences or by glossing over their ineluctable historical reality. For example, one could say that Aquinas and Luther have "essentially the same" doctrine of justification. There can be much truth in this sort of conclusion, given that by Luther's day the nature of Aquinas' account of salvation had been obscured, and that thereafter the views of both in this area have been further obscured. Yet, in the end, an irremovable difference significantly linked with their exceedingly different ontologies (realist/analogical versus nominalist/univocalist) tends to be ignored. Luther's nominalism will not really admit the Thomist paradox of an entirely supernatural righteousness. Instead, the younger, more "participatory" Luther is actually developing the consequences of an almost Monophysite (well, actually *more* Monophysite than the formal monophysitism of the Monophysites — although John Philoponus at least seems already to have been a sort of nominalist) Ockhamist Christology, which can neither think two universal "natures" in a single personal reality nor think this reality other than on the model of a single finite thing "within which" God has somehow entered.[1] Within such a perspective, the participation in Christ by which one is justified edges too closely toward mere identity and subsumption. Actually, Aquinas' apparently similar Cyrilline tendencies have a totally different realist logic. Luther's nominalist univocalism finds another solution in his later extrinsicist, imputational account of grace, which is more obviously alien to that of Aquinas.

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1. See Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society 1994), pp. 231-299; Henry Chadwick, "Philoponus the Christian Theologian," in Richard Sorabji, ed., *Philoponus and the Refection of Aristotelian Science* (London: Duckworth, 1987); and William of Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions*, 5.10.

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This upshot in ecumenical documents does a disservice to the cause of truth and, from an academic perspective, runs the risk of making theology look biased. What seems crucial here is that, while ecumenical reflection makes some use of historical research to upset prejudices about what different communities have believed from their outsets, it does not take this process far enough. At bottom, it is a matter of developing mutual respect between different ecclesial bodies, not of questioning their character. In this respect, ecumenics is very much conducted on a basis internal to received variants of the faith. Yet, here a more external, objective approach might be more inclined to ask questions about the common intellectual assumptions of both the post-Reformation and the post-Tridentine faiths, and the possible deviation of these from earlier Christian views.

There seems to be an increasing consensus among historians that neither the Reformation nor the somewhat elusive "Renaissance," nor even the later "Enlightenment" were anything like such crucial shifts in Western theory and practice as the multiple changes which took place before and after the year 1300.[2] At that time, a far greater gap between specialists and non-specialists in all fields became evident; administration became more technical and distant; clerical control over the laity increased; sharper differentiations were made between academic disciplines; theology assumed a far more technical character; the traditional centrality in theology of participation, deification, apophaticism, allegory, and the church as engendered by the eucharist were all abruptly challenged in a fashion that proved epochally successful. Meanwhile, ecclesial authorities declared unacceptable much that had been taken for granted in the Aristotelian/neo-platonic synthesis and had been shared with Byzantine, Jewish, and Islamic cultures. Many historians claim that the later break-up of Christendom was in large measure the upshot of these changes, and that the same changes ushered in a drift toward "secularity." This has implications both for ecumenism and for the debate about the relation of theology and secular culture. Sometimes, great faith is invested in the possible upshot of Christian reunion, particularly within the Yale School of American theologians: secularization is seen as a negative reaction to Christian disunity; re-unification, as the key to renewed mission. However, if the new emerging historical consensus is correct, then it is rather the case that secularization, not ecumenism, is the prior

2. See Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, tr. by Michael B. Smith (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), pp. 79-113; and Eric Alliez, *Capital Times: Tales from the Conquest of Time*, tr. by Georges Van Dem Abbeele (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1996).

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problem. It might be that Christian division was an outcome of a severe weakening of the Christian vision, and that the key to ecumenical discussion would be a far more drastic critique of existing ecclesial bodies.

However, this may appear to impose too much duality between theology and history. It cannot be an accident that much of the new picture of the history of ideas and of the Church is inspired by theologians prepared to be critical of the contemporary norms of the ecclesial body to which they belong (overwhelmingly, this body is the Roman Catholic Church).

The sources of intellection in theology are often taken to be scripture, tradition, and reason, and all too often the Anglican community has claimed to have a uniquely balanced orientation toward all three *loci*. This way of understanding the grounds for theologizing is, however, unsatisfactory — in fact, it is ultimately an upshot of the "crisis of 1300." It tends to result in arguments for the predominance of one of these elements, or else for compromise between their respective sways. But the problem with "tradition" seems to be solipsism; the problem with "reason" seems to be its unreal and impotent abstraction; the problem with "scripture" is its magical positivity. Compromise among these three again compounds problems and adds to these contradictions, since replete positivity does not need the supplement of community in time or of neutral reason, and tradition cannot admit a positive foundation that would render it redundant.

To overcome this *impasse*, one needs to understand that scripture, tradition, and reason were *not* seen as separate sources prior to 1300. Throughout these considerations, questions arise: first, should one want to *return* to this earlier perspective, or must one return with difference, given a certain validity to some post-1300 considerations? Second, how should one handle a situation in which there is a real secular sphere, as there was not in the Middle Ages? Can a certain pre-1300 fluidity between faith and reason be helpful in the modern predicament?

The transformation of theology from before 1300 to today will now be considered under three categories: the supernatural, the *corpus mysticum*, and allegory. Through all these categories runs a fourth, which will not be considered explicitly on its own: participation. The first three categories derive mostly from the work of Henri de Lubac, especially as re-interpreted by Michel de Certeau, Jean-Yves Lacoste, and Olivier Boulnois. The fourth category derives in part from Erich Przywara, Sergei Bulgakov, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and again Boulnois. What is at issue in the first category is theology between faith and reason; in the second, theology under ecclesial authority; and in the third, theology between scripture and tradition.

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II

A correct Roman Catholic view, proclaimed since the time of the Church under persecution, is that truth should be freely pursued, since all knowledge points toward God. Coercion into understanding defeats its own object, since the divine truth freely shines out everywhere. There is no question then, but that the Church is on the side of free scientific enquiry.

Since at least the Counter-Reformation, however, the Catholic Church has tended to construe its support of science in terms of a duality of reason and faith. In the thought of Cardinal Cajetan, the Thomistic paradox of a natural desire for the supernatural — a desire which must be already the lure of grace, since humanity cannot raise itself to God of its own accord — is occluded.[3] Instead, Cajetan underwrites the late medieval and non-Thomistic espousal of a purely "natural beatitude" accessible by philosophy, according to which the latter is supposed to be able to attain by natural powers of intellect and will to some sort of positive knowledge and contemplation of the divine. By comparison, Aquinas had spoken of a philosophic reach to a negatively defined first cause, and in other statements indicated that even this reach is inseparable from a divine drawing forth by grace, which defines humanity as such.[4] Cajetan instead espoused in effect a "closed humanism," with its own transcendental reach, that essentially was unrelated to the arrival of revelation. Since there was no longer any natural anticipation of grace, faith was now construed in very "extrinsicist" terms as assent to a series of revealed propositions; gradually, in a process culminating in Suarez, revelation also lost its integration of inner experience with interpretation of outward sign, and was bifurcated between one or the other.[5] The realm of grace now concerned external positive data superadded to the conclusions of reason, or else an ineffable realm of inner "mystical" experience, equally positive and equally subject to experimental testing for the reality of "presence."[6]

As both Lacoste and Boulnois argue, modern "philosophy" does not

3. Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel* (Paris: Aubier, 1946); *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, tr. by Rosemary Sheed (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967). See also Jean-Yves Lacoste, "Le désir et l'inéxigible: préambules à une lecture," in *Les Etudes Philosophiques* 2 (1995), pp. 223-246; and Olivier Boulnois, "Les deux fins de l'homme," in the same issue, pp. 205-222.

4. See John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge 2001), Ch. 2, "Truth and Vision," pp. 19-26.

5. See John Montag SJ, "Revelation: The False Legacy of Suarez," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 38-64.

6. Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, *op. cit.*

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simply emancipate itself from theology, but arises in a space that theology has carved out for it: pure nature.[7] To be sure, "natural beatitude" was supposed to correspond roughly to the pagan *theoria* achieved by Plato and Aristotle. But this was a delusion: pagan *physis* was not Christian *natura*, since the latter exists only in paired contrast with the supernatural. It would be true to say that the Platonic and Peripatetic philosophies contain some rough anticipation of the Christian supernatural, as much as they do of the Christian natural, since they both understand wisdom to be primarily the prerogative of the divine, and human wisdom to be sharing in this replete wisdom to some degree.

Boulnois correctly radicalizes Lubac's reading of Aquinas to show that the paradox of natural orientation to the supernatural in Aquinas is in fact in continuity with a cosmology and ontology that adopts themes from the Graeco-Arabic legacy, even though it transforms them in terms of a much stronger grasp of the idea of divine creation.[8] Thus, it is not simply that one naturally desires the supernatural, it is also that intellect modeled on the angelic intellect which moves the celestial spheres, drawn in ceaseless perfect motion by the immovable, only exists in the space of this paradox. Indeed, while all finite motions are proper to specific natures, nature as a whole is only in motion because it is drawn by higher powers toward a stilling of motion. The motion of human intellect is like a more intense and reflexive influx and concentration of natural motion, while the celestial spheres combine the inwardness of the intellect of the separate substances which move them with the totality of circulating finite motion. In this way, the natural human destiny toward the vision of God is only the outworking of a knowingly and willingly created nature of the paradox of creation; of itself, it is nothing, and only exists by participation. (For this reason, creation requires a purer sense of *methexis*, as grasped by the biblical teaching of the presence of wisdom and glory in the cosmos; thus, St Paul, with self-conscious irony, proclaimed *methexis* to the Athenians: "God, in whom we live and move and have our being.") Therefore, everything — not just humanity — is already more than itself, and this more is in some sense a portion of divinity. It is not that something "more" is added to the natural human soul, but rather that the psychic is the conscious concentration of the paradoxical nature of every *ens*. Even though Aquinas rejects the Arabic doctrines of a single superhuman

7. Lacoste, "Le désir et l'inéxigible," *op. cit.*; and Boulnois, "Les deux fins de l'homme," *op. cit.*

8. Boulnois, "Les deux fins de l'homme," *ibid.*

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intellect, he nevertheless adopts their concern to attend to the phenomenology of thinking, which presupposes that one is never in charge of thought: thought occurs, so thinking is something occurring within one, as well as something that one thinks.

The collapse of the paradox of the natural orientation to the supernatural was an aspect of the collapse of this entire cosmology and ontology. Aquinas had sought a cause for finite being: *esse commune*. But in the later Middle Ages — beginning, ironically, with Siger of Brabant — this was deemed to be a question that made little sense, since *esse* no longer was thought of as something superadded to essence, thereby rendering an arriving accident paradoxically more fundamental than the essential in the constitution of the creature.[9] Instead, one could now ask only for the final cause of finite being in its given finite circumstances. But something finite as existing — the dog in its existing dogness, rather than the why of there being a dog, for example — was now regarded as making full sense in its own finite terms. To know that a truth was from God was no longer, as it was for Aquinas, thought to change the very character of the truth. This new space of univocal existence, of sheer "thereness," quickly became as much thereness for mere entertained thought as for ontic reality. Indeed, the emergence of this space was encouraged inversely by a parallel drift, ever since Roger Bacon, away from the Aristotelian view that knowledge is the realization of migrating species as pure form in one's mind, toward knowledge as representational mirroring of a reality having no essential orientation toward understanding. Ideas and fictions now started to acquire ontological equality with real being as all equally "things."[10]

The new univocalist/representational space was one that could be explored as the realm of pure nature. It extended beyond the finite: indeed, as Boulnois points out, Duns Scotus found it contradictory that Aquinas had combined the view that the primary object of the human intellect is sensory with the view that every act of understanding is orientated toward the supernatural.[11] Instead of Thomas' aporias and conundra, he substituted the view that the human intellect, in its pure prelapsarian essence, is naturally capable of the grasp of non-material essences: this (already, following Karl Rahner, one wants to say "transcendentalist") reaches the intellect and is then the natural base for the

9. See Olivier Boulnois, *Etre et Représentation: Une généalogie de la Metaphysique Moderne à L'Epoque de Duns Scot (xiii –xiv siècle)* (Paris: PUF, 1999).

10. *Ibid.*

11. Boulnois, "Les deux fins de l'homme," *op. cit.*

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reception of positive supernatural information.

The combination of a univocalist and representational concept of understanding — intellect represents "things" simply there in their differential exemplifying of a bare "presence" outside participation — with the idea of a natural beatitude permitted theology to encourage the emergence of independent philosophy faculties in the early modern period (the diverse presence of philosophy in mediaeval arts and theology faculties represented a totally different intellectual economy). Where previously philosophy had survived as a kind of pagan "moment" within Christian theology, which was linked with the necessary discursiveness of our finitude, there were now professional "philosophers." Ironically, the new division of powers had emerged in part to counter the threat of Latin Averroism, which was thought (probably erroneously) to pursue a philosophy altogether independent of theology. The only drastic way to achieve institutional control over such tendencies was to purge theology of an essential metaphysical detour through a vision of the participatory reflection of the divine essence in the cosmos, and to insist that it is rather a purely positive discourse founded upon the divine *potentia absoluta*, now regarded as a real unknown reserve of limitless options. In this way, there can be a final court of appeal against wayward reason, whose procedures are not so much guaranteed by partial illuminatory intuition and dialectical discursiveness as by recourse to positive sources and to methods for discriminating among and ordering those sources. Actually, this new positive approach was only perfected in the 16th century with the new insistence on theological *loci*, especially in the work of Melchior Cano.

What is important to grasp here is what appears to be the counter-intuitive link between a new autonomy for philosophy and an increased censorship of, or aspiration to censor philosophy by theology. This remains crucial for understanding the situation even today. But, as Lacoste has noted, this had ludicrous consequences. Granted autonomy to explore pure nature, philosophers did not find what they were supposed to find, but were announcing materialisms, pantheisms, idealisms, etc. Shortly thereafter, they were disconnecting natural beatitude from any contemplation of the divine. This meant that the only "true" philosophy was mostly done by the theologians' left hand. Philosophy was supposed to be able to reach natural truth solely by reason. But since faith knew that the higher truth of revelation overrides apparently sound reasonings, every philosophy conflicting with faith had to be denied twice over: first, on positive grounds of faith; and second, in terms of a better reasoning which then must be sought out.

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Such convolutions surely have helped to bring Christianity into disrepute. Yet, they are entirely remote from the real outlook of the High Middle Ages. What is more, the "bad" philosophers of modernity have always been more truly theological than the "sound" ones, since they have refused to conclude to God from uninflected objective reason, and thereby have in some measure avoided idolatry. All this has been set out in detail, though from very different if complementary perspectives, by Michael Buckley and Jean-Luc Marion.[12]

But are the same mistakes still being perpetuated today? Roman Catholic culture finds it very difficult, for institutional reasons, to deny a false Tridentine legacy altogether, and to pursue all the consequences of Lubac's theological revolution (a subversion as real as it was stealthy). An enterprise of "natural theology," which historians have now shown dates back no further than to Duns Scotus, is perpetuated, along with a non-Thomist "natural law," i.e., apart from the law of charity. This perpetuation is common to both "conservatives" and "liberals." Indeed, it is that secret common ground upon which they are distributed *as* conservatives and liberals, stressing respectively either faith or reason, but both assuming a two-tier economy. Even someone as influenced by Lubac as Balthasar still pursues, unlike Lubac, a "metaphysical" prolegomenon to *sacra doctrina*. When discussing Martin Heidegger, he falls into exactly the same trap as Etienne Gilson: Heidegger has recovered the ontological difference already known to Thomas, yet does not "pursue questioning far enough," thereby perpetuating as a pure mystery the non-necessity of the ontic and the excess of the ontological shown through this contingency. Further questioning is supposed to give rise ineluctably to the thought of being as a personal donor.[13] But, of course, it does not: such a recourse remains also a "mystery." Heidegger has his own resolution of the mystery: being is also nothing, but is the continual presencing of absence in time.

In purely rational terms, Heidegger appears to be the more rigorous of the two, if by "rational" one means the exploration of pure given nature as representable by finite intellect and subject to the maneuvering of finite will. As Lacoste contends, the space of pure nature must confine the human essence to what the human being is capable of, and must equally

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12. Michael Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Jean-Luc Marion, *L'Idole et La Distance* (Paris: Grasset et Fasquelle, 1977).

13. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. V: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, tr. by Brian McNeil, *et al.* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), pp. 635-65.

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confine true human understanding to this capacity in its cognitive aspect.[14] Within such a confinement, the world will be defined by technological capacity, by an empty reach toward a sublime unknown, and by systematic indeterminacy, since limits turn out to be the perpetual anarchic transgression of limits (the inevitable postmodern turn of modernity), as well as by the horizon of death. As Lacoste points out, even the later Heidegger's exceeding of these options in terms of a symbolic dwelling within the cosmos remains a resignation to the impersonal, without hope beyond death, and thus subordinate to the desires and aspirations of the body.

It would seem, then, that the history of modern ideas negatively bears out the view that no natural beatitude will be concluded to, save under the promptings of an explicit orientation to the supernatural. This situation is half-recognized in the papal encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*,[15] where philosophy is exhorted to be "wisdom" rather than merely "reason," and this means to take account of right desiring, of the link between thought and life, and to be open to receive something beyond the grasp of reason. This is all well and good, but needs further defining. The "autonomy" of rational enquiry is still advocated, and not merely in terms of legal freedom (which one should, of course, endorse, in keeping with the early Christian view that truth can only be freely accepted), but also in terms of some essential good proceeding from such autonomy. However, if right desiring and openness to revelation have entered the picture, then, according to post-Lubac logic, this is already a work of grace, and already exists in some sort of typological, i. e., historical, relation to scripture and tradition. All the traces of "wisdom" on which philosophy might build in the modern world do not stand simply "outside" Christian tradition, as far as this tradition is concerned. Thus, all ethical topics are marked by the passage of the gospel through the world, and even when philosophy appeals to the Greeks, it appeals to a legacy which is taken up, in part and in places, in the New Testament, and is thereby a constituent element of Christianity.

However, the exaggerated and somewhat naïve opposition of the encyclical to "relativism," which militates against attention to historicity, means that the pursuit of wisdom cannot be pursued in this fashion. Instead, *Fides et Ratio* seems at times to insist on a reason that is the same in all times and places, and is an autonomous natural faculty without presuppositions. In that case, this is a return to all the old post-Tridentine absurdities: the world is granted leave to think autonomously; yet, left to

14. Lacoste, "Le désir et l'inéxigible," *op. cit.*
15. John Paul II, *Faith and Reason* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1998).

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itself, it turns out that it cannot do this. So, the Church ends up teaching the contradiction that autonomy needs assistance.

Given this situation, one natural reaction is fideistic. It tells a story: once upon a time, it seemed as if the Church could rely on metaphysical cosmology; then, it seemed as if it could rely upon a metaphysical ethics; but now, it must learn to cling to the Cross alone — perhaps construing even this as the tragic presence of God in his secular absence. It is the story told by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and also in large measure by Balthasar, although the latter still adds to revelation the (essentially Kantian) props of a phenomenological aesthetic and personalistic ethics taken as prolegomena, if only in part.[16] However, this is not to suggest a critique of Balthasar in the manner of Karl Barth and in a purely fideistic recourse.

The alleged profundity of the fideistic grand narrative turns out to be adolescent. What has been outgrown is not a natural childhood, but a childhood of error without innocence that need never have happened, which is not *at all* to say that mankind should have remained forever in the culture of the 12th and 13th centuries; no, it is an *unknown* future that mankind has missed and must seek to rejoin. Historical research since the 1960s make it abundantly clear that the metaphysical cosmology of the High Middle Ages was thoroughly informed by and transformed through the biblical legacy. When this metaphysics was lost with the nominalists, it was not on the basis of a rediscovery of a biblical God of will, law, and covenant, etc., but rather as the consequence of a catastrophic invasion of the West by ultimately Islamic norms (which are now turned back on Islam, imagining them to be the "other"). The very 1277 condemnations by the Archbishops of Paris and of Canterbury, which swept away a cultural legacy shared with Islam (as well as with Judaism and Byzantium) also repeated within the West a gesture of Islamic orthodoxy: banish and regulate philosophy; impose instead a positivistic order based on literal punctilear revelation underwritten by absolute sovereignty, which is now the only trace on earth of an inscrutable deity. Caliphization of the West: the Bible is now read as if it were the Koran, with Calvin's *asharia* looming on the horizon.

In light of these developments, it proved extremely difficult to think through the central Christian doctrines that depend on the realism of universals, reality of relation, and the truth of *methexis* — all denied by the terminists. Thus, Ockham's Trinity becomes three ontic persons within one unity of an individual; his Christology appears Monophysite, because

16. See especially, Hans urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way of Revelation*, ed. by Alexander Dru (London: Sheed and Ward, 1977).

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he cannot think the divine hypostasis relationally; transubstantiation is trivialized into bilocation and extrinsicist miracle, and the Creation starts to acquire such autonomy that, for Ockham, there is no longer any "reason" to ascribe its origin to God, rather than to the intelligences. Consequently, all these doctrines become lifeless: no longer informing reason, they are rather matters merely to be believed on pain of death in this world or the next. They are now left to the Church as a huge pile of nakedly ideological resources.

The cosmos of participation was never "argued against" in some unanswerable fashion. There was simply an epistemic switch, complexly linked with social transformations to representation and univocity. Certain tenets of natural philosophy may have been disproved, but even here one can exaggerate: Thomas Torrance has rightly pointed out how much nearer Robert Grosseteste's Christian/neo-platonic cosmology of light, with its "Cantorian" sets of nested differentiated infinities (and actually no celestial/terrestrial duality), was to modern physics than that of the Later Middle Ages or of Newton.[17]

The point then is not that one must now cling to faith in ascetic nakedness. Instead, one must pass beyond the still all-too-modern fideism of neo-orthodoxy, and move toward a "radical orthodoxy" that refuses the duality of reason and faith. The issue is that what has recently passed for reason is not, as far as Catholic faith is concerned, the work of the *logos* at all, or only jaggedly and intermittently so. Recent reason shows this to be the case negatively, since the strict rigorous upshot of its objective, representing concern is to discover the rule of unreason beyond reason, and the founding of sense in nonsense. Reason's domain is nihilism; whereas the discovery of a meaningful world governed by a *logos* can be made only by faith. This is perhaps the nearest one can get to an apologetic gesture (echoing Jacobi's thought), but it still does not decide the issue ineluctably.[18]

As Lacoste suggests, what has passed for reason is a mere decision to see that which is, in a Promethean sense, within one's capacity as the key to human nature and the secrets of the world, or else the key to a knowable world limited to the truth that arises for human purposes. This has often

17. Thomas Torrance, "Creation and Science," in *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1980), pp. 144-75; "The Theology of Light," in *Christian Theology and Scientific Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981). Here, one must admit Grosseteste's Neoplatonism and escape his straining at the limits of Calvinism.

18. See John Milbank, "Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Jacobi and Hamann," in *Radical Orthodoxy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-38

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been seen as a pious gesture: confine reason and nature within their limits, thereby letting the gratuity of grace in its glory shine all the more. Even in the case of Kant, a true reading shows that he is trying to protect a rarefied and anti-liturgical pietistic faith from contamination by limited images, much more than to protect reason from contamination by religion — Kant, the last Scotist, Ockhamist, Suarezian, as he has been variously described.

The Kantian attempt to acknowledge limits self-deconstructs, since they will appear only if one claims to surmount them absolutely. Thus, one gets Kant's dogmatic hierarchy of practically perceived *noumena* above theoretically perceived phenomena. Yet, even a postmodern, deconstructed Kant, where the sublime overflows every temporary restraint, still erects a shrine to pure nature and the confines of reason: its mark is now the hypostatization of the unknown only as an empty void, and refusal of any possibility of "beautiful" mediation between the invisible and the visible.

However, this worship of limits that constructs pure reason is only a *decision* without reasons. As Lacoste has explained, such a decision adopts a hermeneutic of human essence and of nature, which makes that which lies within perceived capacity fundamental. But, suppose that the human aspiration or even openness to that which lies beyond its capacity were taken instead to be the hermeneutic key? Lacoste here puts in a sharper light the insistence of many 20th century Christians — Charles Peguy supremely — on the virtue of hope. Reason orientated only to a beatitude supposedly within its grasp dispenses with hope, only to end up without hope, and at best resigned to this condition. Likewise, if such a reason is taken to be hermeneutically decisive, it must downgrade the promptings, urgings, and longings of the body. The supernatural in one may be intelligence as such, intelligence thinking through one, but it is also always conjoined with sensation, as Aquinas taught. Therefore, intelligence begins as a bodily exercise, accompanied by desire that reaches into the unknown. Only by the exercise of an artificial abstraction can one prise reason apart from desire, which reaches beyond one's capacity. This prised-apart "pure reason" is also a totally individualistic reason, whether on the level of the single person or of collective humanity. For such a *logos*, one cannot be completed by the other, and so others cannot mediate to one the lure of a wholly other who is also "not other" as *intimo interior meo*, according to the creationist logic of paradoxical priority of supplementation.

What *faith* proposes as *reason*, then, is taking as hermeneutic keys to reality, first *hope*, and then *charity,* which is the erotic lure of the other and one's giving oneself over to the other.

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How does such a perspective impact upon the task of theology today? Primarily, it absolutely forbids mankind to baptize the secular desert as the realm of pure reason, pure nature, natural law or natural rights, etc., since this is not at all to acknowledge this sphere in its integrity, but rather to define it in terms of an impoverished baroque theology, even though it still defines itself in this way, as if everyone were really a headless theologian. Rather, what one sees is a postmodern simultaneity of remote times, places, and cultures. It cannot be dealt with in terms of a single Western liberal narrative of pure nature, because this will only issue in bombs and destruction of the other. And none of this complex confusion is exactly "outside" the Church! The Church reads it all in terms of multiple, but converging narratives of typological anticipation, unrecognized scattering of the seeds sown by the incarnate *logos*, and various fallings-away and partial survivals of Christian norms.

So, the answer cannot be the one Tracy offers, i.e., responsibility before a uniform liberal court. This court is a fiction, and one whose dark inner secret is constituted by a voluntarist theology securing order through the formal regulation of chaos from a single sovereign center. Such a liberal option in theology remains confined within a logic constructed by extrinsicism. Its essentially authoritarian character is revealed when it stamps philosophical conclusions already reached with a theological seal of approval derived from doctrines that extrinsically symbolize supposedly universal truths.

But the answer cannot be fideistic, and it cannot even be that of Ratzinger — to the extent that this is not entirely self-consistent, and still preserves, like Balthasar, traces of a metaphysical prolegomenon, even for Christians, and of a somewhat still-too-positivistic account of revealed truth. Revelation is not in any sense a layer added to reason. It arrives as the augmentation of illumination, and faith is found only in the highly complex and tortuous course of a reason that is hopeful and charitable. It is lodged in all the complex networks of human practices, and its boundaries are as messy as those of the Church. Lubac's paradox forbids one to privilege either a human above or a human below. Rather, what has real priority in his scheme is the supernatural, which so exceeds human hierarchies that it includes every degree of them equally, and is as near to the below as to the above. So, although the lure of the supernatural takes precedence over nature that is drawn toward it (and this cannot be perverted into Rahner's transcendentalist terms), this lure is only acknowledged by aspiring nature in all her lowly variety. Theological truth abides, first of all, in the body of

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the faithful. Yet, where are their bodies, especially today? Not neatly gathered in, but disseminated outwards in complex minglings and associations. A faith obedient to the Church is protected from solipsism precisely at the point where one recognizes that the Church always has been, as John Henry Newman recognized, the taking-up and inter-mingling of many traditions. It even consists from the outset in seeing how the diverse might cohere, and continues to enact this analogical mingling.

Therefore, the plural spaces of the academy, as perhaps *best* symbolized by religious studies departments, where alone *alternative* traditions of reason are sometimes recognized, are not totally other to the space of the Church, which is also pluralistic and also construes its truth, as does the Bible, to be, in one of its aspects, a certain narration of "the history of religions." The difference is that the Church has a project of integration, to which the theologian is bound.[19] Within both the academy and the Church, the task of theology is to foreground Christian difference and non-difference — to think through the Christian *logos* as something entirely exceptional, which also continues and elevates what is most usual to humanity.

III

How is the nature of ecclesial authority and its bearing on theology to be understood? Marion has said that the key is to realize that the bishop is the true theologian.[20] He is right, but his point has usually been misunderstood (especially in the US). What he invokes is a vital link between theology and the eucharist. The bishop is the original president at the eucharist; he is also the prime preacher of the word, a function which he performs only in conjunction with his re-presenting of the body and blood of Christ.

The idea that all theologians must derive their authority from the bishop is only authoritarian under an erroneous understanding of the relation of the bishop to the eucharist, to the word of God, and to his *cathedra*, which is at once his teaching office and the place where he presides — usually a city of long-standing. However, such an erroneous understanding was already encouraged by shifts in the concept of the Church and its relation to the eucharist in the late mediaeval and early modern periods. As Lubac describes these transformations, roughly after the middle of the 12th century, the term *corpus verum* ceased to be applied to the

19. It is much easier to operate within this kind of department, rather than in a traditional theology department, where Christian liberals always seem to bring to a high point of refinement the paradox of liberal non-tolerance and manipulation.

20. Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, tr. by Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), pp. 139-161.

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Church, and was transferred to the body of Christ in the eucharist. Inversely, the term *corpus mysticum* migrated from the eucharist to the Church.[21] Gradually, the latter was drained of physical solidity, which was transferred to the transubstantiated elements. "Mystical" slowly ceased to mean "to do with the liturgical mysteries of initiatory passage, participation, and ascent," and came to mean secrecy, absence, and symbolism. Accompanying this transformation was a change in the relation of both bodies to the historical body of Christ. Earlier, the sacramental and ecclesial bodies stood near each other, and both represented the historical body. But, in the new scheme, the historical and sacramental bodies start to stand near each other as alien sources of authority over against the Church, which, as Certeau stresses in his brilliant commentary on Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum* and *Medieval Exegeses*, increasingly comes to be seen as an ideal space to be constructed in order to realize the *dicta* of authority, or else to make manifest a new inner "mystical" experience, which is the residue of liturgical ascent that finds no place in a more legal and less liturgical construal of the public sphere.[22]

As long as an essential relation between the three bodies remained, however, strong traces of the older view persisted, e.g., in the thought of Bonaventure or Aquinas. The historical body was mediated to the Church by the sacramental body. The eucharist still "gave" the Church in such a fashion that, as Pickstock puts it, the Church was not a closed self-governing entity, like most political bodies (whether hierarchic or democratic), but rather received its very social embodiment from outside itself.[23] At every eucharist it had, as it were, to begin again, to receive *itself anew from outside*, from the past and from the angelic Church above. Inversely, the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ was seen as a dynamic action of divine self-giving inseparable from the bringing about and consolidating of the body of the faithful. (Incidentally, the term "transubstantiation" is much older than the term "real presence," which perhaps originated with Latimer and Cranmer — *praesentia corporalis* was used in the Middle Ages, but shied away from by Aquinas[24] — and is dubiously linked with a static sense of local presence

21. Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: L'Eucharistie et L'Eglise au Moyen Age* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1949). See also Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 121-167.

22. Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-113.

23. Pickstock, *After Writing*, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-66.

24. See Jean-Yves Lacoste, "*Etre* [c]," in *Dictionnaire Critique de Theologie*, ed. by Jean-Yves Lacoste (Paris: PUF, 1998).

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that is also "over-against" the congregation).

The really drastic change came when, as Certeau, following Lubac, stresses, the sacramental body ceased to perform this mediating function. Then, instead of a triad, one had alternating dyads: a direct relation of either the absent historical body as testified to by scripture to the Church, or else of the sacramental body to the Church, now taken to be a source of authority *independent* of scripture and deriving from a hierarchic transmission of ecclesial orders. As Certeau concludes, this eventually brings about a total shift from a priority of the diachronic to a priority of the synchronic and functional. Previously, the past really had been made present again through the eucharist, and the Church had re-emerged through its sustaining of a bond to the past and the projection forward to the future by the re-offering of the sacraments and the re-interpretation of the *sacra scriptura*. Now, instead, the past started to seem like a remote lost source of authority that historical detective work must flesh out (thus, the rise of humanist concern with "historicity"). As remote, it stood apart from and over against the Church, which no longer re-presented it. Its relation to the other sacramental source of authority was bound now to be disputed, since the sacramental body was no longer seen to be an essential way in which the lost historical body as traced out by the scriptures was "performed" again in the present. Either sacraments as validated by tradition were seen to be an essential supplement to the now remote scriptures, as in the late mediaeval and Tridentine views, or else the need for this supplement was rejected and one was left with the Protestant *sola scriptura.* But Certeau's drastic conclusion here is both rigorous and undeniable: the crucial shift was certainly not the Reformation; rather, Protestantism and Tridentine Catholicism represented two alternative versions of "reformation," which should be defined as the switch from the triadic to the dyadic account of the relation of the various bodies of Christ. This is the sort of realization that could be the ground for a more honest and self-critical ecumenism. (Protestants need to see that the Reformation was mostly a perpetuation of error, while Catholics need to see that much of what they have taken to be Catholic is not authentic).

Under the new perspective, the power of clerical authority was necessarily increased. When the historical body was again made present in the eucharist, and the eucharistic body was only fully realized in the congregation, primary authority was both symbolic and collective, and initially bypassed vertical hierarchy. Only by a sort of reflex was episcopal authority constituted. The bishop was, first of all, powerful to the extent

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that he was identified with a particular *cathedra*. This was a specific intersection of time and place that recorded a particular Christian fulfilment of a particular local legacy. Thus, nearly all churches were built on earlier sacred sites, not primarily as a matter of propaganda, but of vital continuity in and through a surpassing. As president at the eucharist and teacher, the bishop enacted once again the essence of a certain place (usually, the abode of sacred relics) and perpetuated the stream of glory refracted through it in a specific way. The bishop held authority, from Ignatius of Antioch onward, as symbolizing in his singleness the unity of the Church in a single *civitas*. Of course, the bishop was also the guardian and guarantor of correct transmission, and, of course, his exercise of these powers might often overstep the mark of his representational and dramatic function. Nevertheless, up to the middle of the 13th century or so, that clerical sacramental and preaching authority was much more "mingled" with lay participation than it later became (although, at first, in the Late Middle Ages, the laity defended itself with the increased activity of semi-independent lay fraternities).[25] But during this period the techniques of remote, secret, and invasive clerical control, as deployed through auricular confession, exorcism, and staged miracles, first mooted in the 12th century and promulgated through the Lateran Councils, were vastly extended. The "gothic" realm of complex overlapping spaces and social participations started to give way to the "gothick" realm of systematic terror through *surveillance* — it is no accident that one of the great "gothick" novels of the 18th century, Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, deploys a critique of the Spanish Inquisition also as a critique of Calvinist predestinarianism and modernity.

This increased clerical control was inseparable from the new economy of the three bodies. No longer was the transmission of authority carried through in a superhuman "angelic" fashion by liturgical action. No longer did the historical body pass via the bishop into the mouths of communicants or (more often) the eyes of witnesses, who then "performed" what the liturgical script suggested. Instead, the historical and sacramental bodies

25. This is how some of Eamon Duffy's evidence should be interpreted. Duffy takes less account than Bossy and Scarisbrick of a late medieval decadence inaugurating tendencies that early modernity will intensify, because he wishes to argue that Catholicism was in good shape on the eve of the Reformation. In this respect, his position is less complex than that of the two other writers. See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

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were now more like inert objects in need of human subjective assistance. For the magisterial Reformation, the ordained clergy were the privileged interpreters of the Word, who quickly established "orthodox" parameters within which it could be read, thus neutralizing its supposedly self-interpreting authority, as Catholic critics swiftly pointed out. For Tridentine Catholicism, the ordained hierarchy was the guarantee of a eucharistic miracle now seen as a spectacle quite apart from its dynamic action of "giving" the body of the Church.

Thus, one cannot possibly speak of an increased lay influence in Protestantism over against a Catholic clericalist reaction. Rather, in either case, there is a substantial loss of medieval lay participation (as the British Catholic historians, John Bossy, John Scarisbrick, and Eamon Duffy have all argued),[26] while in either case there is also a significant rise in compensating lay pieties and mysticisms that try to colonize the no man's land that had arisen in the gap between a closed humanism, on the one hand, and an extrinsicist system of dogma, on the other. As Certeau argues, a "mystic" discourse arises with a re-doubling of the sense of the absence of a true ecclesial body, although it is often recruited into the machinations of ecclesiastical discipline and the attempts to verify abstractions with experience and to build a new future on the basis of formal method.

It would seem, then, that the earlier, high medieval model offers a much better understanding of the relation of the bishop to teaching and so to theological reflection. Theology is answerable to the bishop as the occupant of the *cathedra* and as the president at the eucharist. But this means that the theologian is primarily answerable, not so much to a Church hierarchy in its synchronic spatiality — this is all too modern — but rather to a hierarchical, educative *manuductio* of the faith down through the ages. Equally, he is answerable to a specific locality or very often multiple specific localities, such that his sense of perpetuating a history must be combined with his sense of pursuing an archeology and mapping a geography. Finally, he is also answerable to the mode of the reception of the Sacrament and the Word by the congregation, even if in the early 21st century this is often impossible, and the theologian must exercise what is an excessively critical function by ideal standards.

But this sounds rather abstract. Who really constrains the theologian and to what degree? The bishop? The congregation? And how is one to understand the workings of ecclesiastical hierarchy today in the realm of

26. For a summary of their views, see Pickstock, *After Writing*, *op. cit.*

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knowledge, given the great approval that the Church appears to extend to democracy in the secular sphere.

IV

To try to answer these questions, it is helpful to go back to Nicholas de Cusa's early work, *De Concordantia Catholica*.[27] While this was a conciliarist treatise, Cusanus' later papalist position did not abandon its essential conclusions. This is interesting, because it almost uniquely preserves at a late date a much earlier perspective on the mediating role of sacramental signs, between historical and ecclesial bodies. At the same time, it also shows traces of more modern elements that are perhaps inescapable today: a new stress on mass assembled participation in the present, and on historical variation due to the cultural variety of human imagining. In addition, following Augustine, Cusanus and other patristic sources anticipate an apocalyptic time when the Church is in terminal decline, which may be the situation today. Perhaps, Cusanus provides some keys not merely to recovering the lost pre-1300 world, but also to going forward to the future one might always have had, yet never had.

Cusanus claims that the eucharist generates the Church. What stands uppermost in the Church hierarchy is not a *de jure* legal power, but rather sacramental signs. In this way, in the Dionysian tradition, the ecclesial and the experiential are still fused through liturgical mysteries. For Cusanus, the sacramental signs correspond at a lower level of the cosmic hierarchy with the Triune God at the top of the hierarchy. God is said to know fully the members of the Church in love, and they are orientated to the Trinity through a desire that exceeds their intellection — a very "Eastern" element here. The next rank within the heavenly *ecclesia*, eternal Jerusalem (wherein God "is" through all perpetuity, as in later Russian sophiology) below God, is the angelic. The angels, in a rather Arabic fashion, see into all human intellects, and human thought puts one in contact with the separate intelligences. Within the ecclesial hierarchy, the priesthood is linked to the angelic in terms of its teaching function, and its occupancy of *cathedrae*, since the *Apocalypse* says that angels are guardians of ecclesial places. In the third rank comes the blessed in heaven, who link to humanity on earth through the body, and who correspond to the body of the faithful within the Church Militant here below.

There are certain complications within this scheme: in relation to

27. Nicholas of Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance*, tr. by Paul E. Sigmund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), especially Book I, § 1-68.

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their *orders* the clergy correspond to the first sacramental rank, but this seals the priority of their sacramental, transmissive function over their authoritative, teaching one. In fact, the clergy span all three degrees, because, in terms of their participation with the laity in intercessory offices, they belong to the lowest level, which simply praises and does not mediate. In addition, there seems to be a certain lack of consistency: the laity are the most bodily, and yet their function of praise is also a spiritual synthesis of sacramental sign and physically situated *cathedra*, The same lack of clarity pertains in the heavenly Church: the resurrected faithful are the most corporeal, and yet their third psychic position (in keeping with the Neoplatonic hierarchy of the One, *nous,* and *psyche*) also synthetizes through desire the origin that is God and the intellection that belongs to the angels. Perhaps, the confusion has its source in the blending of Proclus with Trinitarian theology, since for Cusanus all these degrees also correspond to the respective persons of the Trinity, and though the Son as *logos* is intellectual, as *imago* he is also somewhat "corporeal," compared with the unity in desire shown by the Spirit.

The presence of the Trinity at the top of the hierarchy has a deconstructive effect at every level, although Cusanus also inherits the deconstructions inherent in Proclean Neoplatonism. Yet, here he offers the fullest exhibition ever of the multiple paradoxes of hierarchy. Out of them he generates an early democratic theory. The idea that he simply "mixes" mediaeval hierarchy with proto-modern democracy, as Paul Sigmund says, is simply not the case; instead, he returns to earlier high medieval mystical and educative notions of hierarchy, and out of these notions generates new democratic theses.[28] This gives a basis for conciliarism and consensus other than William of Ockham's constructualism, which blasphemously reduces Church government to a balance of power between formally considered individual forces.

The place to begin is with the paradoxes already glimpsed by Neoplatonism. Paradox one: for a hierarchy to be a hierarchy, it requires stages, or else it would be a flux without quality. But then, a stage can be distinguished within a flux only if it marks out a *level*, which will be a field of equality. To sustain the ontological primacy of hierarchy — every emanation from on high is continuously diminishing — the level must be broken up as a hierarchy within a hierarchy. This, of course, threatens a *mise en abyme*, indicated in Cusanus' text by a slightly insane process of triadic

28. Paul E. Sigmund, "Introduction" to Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance*, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxvii-ix.

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sub-dividing by an author who knew that finitude was subject to infinite division. A consequence of this logic of levels is that the subordinate within a certain stage is nonetheless equal — with its subordinateness entirely cancelled — to all members of that stage, if one rises to a more fundamental hierarchical viewpoint.

This is what provides Cusanus with his fundamental conciliarist principle. From the *highest* perspective, all that is created is on a level; within the Church Militant, all its members are on a level, just as the sacramental and ecclesial bodies are on a level. Since the true ontological character of the Church, following Augustine, is peace and harmony, which for Cusanus is extended into *discors concordia*, the first ruling principle within the Church is consensus. Not, of course, majority rule, but absolute consensus, since the Church is not a vehicle of correct teaching, but the *event* of *concordantia*. Doctrine is about nothing but the giving of divine *concordantia* in the Creation, and its restoration through the Incarnation and the Church. Thus, there cannot be true teaching without consensus — even if this consensus and the key to harmony can dwindle to being present only in a few. Augustine anticipates that this will eventually happen only when the "last of the last" will remain.[29] This is why teaching is inseparable from the guarantee of the Holy Spirit's presence in the Church. In the long run and for the most part, the members of the Church will be reliable, because otherwise there could be no true doctrine. In fact, doctrine is first of all a body and not simply words: Christ was the supreme teacher as the event of the return of *concordantia* to the world. For truth, there must be democratic consent, although this must also be a uniting in "the right way," according to the true measure of harmony. If "democracy" failed, the Church would cease to be; however, much of the time the keys to democratic consensus must be safeguarded by an ecclesiastical elite, gathered round the bishops.

At this point, the significance of the nested hierarchy within each level comes to the fore. It is not really a principle in opposition to "democracy." That is only the case where, within a closed immanent circle based on a balance of interests between forces, a sovereign center is granted *de facto* power. This is why liberalism always generates terrifying hierarchies not linked to the transmission of values: hierarchies of money, bureaucratic organization and policing. Here, one has the necessary authoritarian counterpart to the mitigated anarchy of market society. By contrast, the power Cusanus invests in the *cathedra* is a salve against the

29. Augustine, *Ad Hesychium* (PL 33 p. 913), cited by Cusanus, *The Catholic Concordance*, *op. cit.*, Book I, §14.

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closure that the emerging sovereign state and later liberal democracy would soon place around a specific, often "national" community. In fact, even a global community is closed against a wider democracy, if it is only "in the present." This is the point of Edmund Burke's appeal to the votes of all the ages: the bishop and those gathered round him must sustain the *concordantia* with the past, and preserve its resources for the future against the likely ravages of the present. Thus, the bishop is poised between the always arriving order of signs and the people's consensus, which alone can fulfill that order. His authority derives from both. Ultimately, of course, he must appeal to the widest democracy of all, i.e., the original *concordantia* of the whole cosmos, grounded in the consensus of the Trinity, which Cusanus already presents as the coincidence of the opposites of the one and the many.

Cusanus' ecclesiology results constitute the interplay between democratic and aristocratic principles, combined with a monarchial principle in terms of the papacy. But even in the latter case, the stress is on *cathedra*: the pope's authority is that of an ancestral place,[30] which has been the focal intersection of so much for so long, evil as well as good, and is likely to have priority in terms of the persistence of the rhythms of truth. This is how Cusanus sees it. To a lesser degree, the same applies to every episcopal seat. Thus, a single principle legitimates *both* the democratic and the aristocratic aspects. This principle is "for the most part." Applied synchronically, one gets democracy; the consensus of the entire laity and clergy is the most reliable guide — a Newman-like principle. Applied diachronically, one gets aristocracy: the longest persisting locations and their representatives will be the least likely to err. Yet, the entire diachrony merges with an eternal synchrony: the voices of all times and places are the final court of appeal, insofar as they sing with one true voice of praise.

Thus, for Cusanus, speaking *ex cathedra*, true infallibility resides in the whole Church because of the hypostatic presence of the Holy Spirit, without which human salvation would be null and void. It resides in the conciliar assembly of the bishops and, finally, in the supreme *cathedra* of Rome — the longest abiding seat of sacred legitimacy. The pope is the supreme guardian: he has the right to summon a general council. But the consensus of the council is a more reliable locus of infallibility than the pope, since it is weaker than the entire *ecclesia.* A council has the right to depose a false pope. Cusanus holds this view even in his later papalist phase.[31]

30. Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance*, *op. cit.*, Book I, § 56-9.
31. Sigmund, "Introduction," *op. cit.*, pp. xxxiii.

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Throughout these considerations, which owed much to Cyprian as well as to Augustine, Cusanus never lost sight of his sense of the primacy of the sacramental. This primacy, as Augustine saw against the Donatists, ensures that even erring clergy can be true ministers, since belief in the infallibility of the Church is not a peculiar superstition, but resides ultimately in one's trust in certain signs. Since one cannot command the meaning of any sign, true signs will always outwit one's worst intentions, and will inhabit one promisingly, despite oneself. This is how the Holy Spirit is hypostatically present in the Church.

A second paradox of hierarchy is that the higher element within a lower stage must always be more akin to the *lower* than to the higher stages. This is aporetic, because stages involve not just a smooth descent, but a regular folding back of the whole process upon itself to produce the instance of stages. Thus, the high element within each stage re-invokes the summit *out of series*, while the lower one anticipates the nethermost base, also out of series. Thus, e.g., if the hierarchy runs throughout from Spirit to Body, the higher elements in lower stages will be more spiritual than the lower elements within that stage, but more bodily than everything higher up, so that these elements shift undecidably between "more spirit" and "more body." There will also be an increasing tendency as one descends the hierarchy to perceive even the uppermost stages as "more bodily," and thus an asymptotic tendency *to reverse* the hierarchy in the lower stages altogether. Ethnographers have discovered that many local tribes with symbolic hierarchies actually carry this through this reversal, so that, e. g., "male" will be on top in the higher realm, but "female" in the lower.

This second paradox can combine with a third to produce an interesting effect. The third paradox, of which Neoplatonism was fully aware, is to produce a distinct new level that must "hold back" the free fall of emanation: a new charge from the original source must somehow flow down the chain and to a degree interrupt the process of diminution. Or, to put this the other way around, a distinct new phase must somehow override the immediately higher intermediaries and re-invoke the origin directly.

When combined, these two paradoxes tend to produce explicit reversal in the lower realm, and parallel orders of hierarchy, albeit hierarchically arranged. In the case of Cusanus, this happens with the body of the faithful. Insofar as concerns are more fleshly, they assume priority. The laity of the Church are governed by the Emperor within a separate hierarchy that owes direct responsibility to the Trinity.[32] Cusanus denies the authenticity of the

32. Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance*, *op. cit.*, Book III, § 294-312

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donation of Constantine, and the crowning of the Emperor is seen as confirmation of an already proclaimed power, as applies also to the coronation of the Pope. Yet, the realm of the emperor still belongs to *ecclesia*. Unlike his contemporaries, Cusanus does not speak of "the state." Ultimately, concerns of the flesh remain subordinate to those of the spirit, and the emperor, like the pope, is still answerable to the infallibility of the entire body of the Church. Insofar as this is concentrated and focused in the pope, in some sense he remains answerable to Rome. Indeed, he is the Holy Roman Emperor. (Cusanus' perspective is naturally Germanic).

A fourth paradox of hierarchy is much accentuated by Trinitarian theology. The origin of a hierarchy cannot merely be the highest rung: as the source of every stage, it must transcend hierarchy and even equalize within itself all stages of the hierarchy, negating their differentiation. This is the Neoplatonic doctrine of the mystical One. However, the Trinity tends to turn this non-differentiation into the preservation as much as obliteration of the many, as Cusanus stresses. But this increases the sense that, at the top, there are no longer any degrees. Furthermore, hierarchy requires distinguished stages, and in fact a minimum of three stages, since if there were only two there would not be mediation and interval and thus no stages at all. So Cusanus, like Neoplatonism in general, posits three main stages, and also subdivides his stages into three. But the Trinity teaches that the One is also Three, and that it "complicates" what hierarchy "explicates," to use Cusanus' terminology. Within every stage, the totality of the stage ranks above the uppermost rank, so that the bishop is above the laity, but the whole Church is above the bishop. The invocation of the Trinity, however, makes this principle apply to the totality of everything that is created and not Creator. Because in God the second and the third stage are equal and co-original, this means that the totality of the cosmos really comes next after God, since at the summit of the created hierarchy all the lower degrees are fully equalized: body is restored to parity with spirit, as occurs in the resurrection of the dead.

The cosmos, however, is really the totality of the restored cosmos concentrated in the heavenly Jerusalem. In his glorious presence, this is God plus the angels, plus the resurrected faithful.[33] At this highest level, one can infer that the laity and the Emperor are equalized with the bishop, while the latter's *cathedra* is equalized with sacramental signs now fully

33. This is the Sophia that is also the ground of the procession of the Son and the Spirit in the Trinity for the Russians, or the primal "outgoing" that Gregory of Nyssa named *dynamis*, and Dionysius *dynameis*.

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released. Indeed, via the resurrected body of the Lamb in the heart of the eternal city, the Bride Jerusalem is equalized with God and drawn through deification entirely into the life of the Trinity.

Thus, the principle of hierarchical ascension guards truth against democracy, but the more ascension is enacted, the more is democracy implemented in the truth. It is not that democracy is a compromise for the here and now: it can only arrive in the perfection of *concordantia* as deification. To eternalize democracy and to maintain its link with excellence, rather than with the mutual concessions of baseness, requires deification as the doctrine of the offer of equality with God.

Such divine democracy is approximated to here below in the processes of historical *traditio*. For Cusanus, as a "Renaissance" thinker, these now include a passage through the cultural relativity of different human fictions: different sacraments and sacrifices in all human cultures, which all really indicate the one sign of Christ and his sacrifice.[34] It is here that a "modern" factor enters the picture: a new sense that institutions really do spring from collective "makings." This sense is also what pushes Cusanus toward revealing the latent democratic implications of an inherited and highly traditional — in his day, totally out of date — Trinitarian and liturgical hierarchical vision. Even hierarchical structures are erected by fashioned consensus, beginning with God himself. Cusanus was a truly "radically orthodox."

For Cusanus, as for Augustine, the ontological diminution through emanation worked also downwards through time. For Augustine, the sixth age of the world inaugurated by Christ is human old age, marked by decline and a worsening of the effects of the Fall. Yet, here also, the paradoxes kick in, reinforced by Trinitarian theology: direct contact with the Origin can be established even in senescence. Almost at the end, there has been absolute rejuvenation. Thus, for Augustine, "progress" becomes possible for the first time in the era of ultimate degeneration. Here is an absolute duality: as W. H. Auden understood in his libretto for the Christmas Oratorio, "For the Time Being," the Incarnation institutes a time of dread when one must live in the partial meaninglessness of an aftermath to the appearance of the ultimate — live in absolute waiting for the consummation of what was begun and yet is, "for the time being," suspended.[35] It is also the time of terrible demand for body perfection and,

34. *Ibid.*, Book I, § 4.

35. W.H. Auden, "For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio," in *Collected Longer Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968).

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therefore the time when this absolute demand for goodness will be rejected. In Augustinian terms, evil will appear in its nakedness as the Antichrist. Confronted with this terror, the faithful are likely to be fewer and fewer, until the "last of the last." Cusanus agreed, and thought he had reached that point. Writing in the *De Concordantia* in 1433, he gave the world 600 more years, until Europe had been destroyed, although Christ preached throughout the world. Therefore, he anticipated both globalization and the end of Christendom. Yet, this disastrous era is also the time in which at last a conciliar and democratic ideal that will truly reflect the Trinity can be achieved on earth.

In a sense, it is comforting to realize that mankind's predicament was foreseen from the outset — Augustine and Cusanus only build on Christ's warnings and promises in the gospels. This is neither triumphalism nor celebration of secular autonomy, but a catastrophic refusal of charity. However, the hypostatic presence of the Holy Spirit on earth will not fail, and thus the "time being" will still prove to be a time of meaningful realization of deified democracy: especially in the darkening period toward the end. There will be decline, and yet there will be progress.

IV

Therefore, theology is answerable to reason precisely insofar as it is answerable to the Church. In the latter domain, it is first of all answerable to the Triune God, since theology is participation in the mind of God before it is obedience to any authority, whether scriptural or hierarchical. As such, it is equally a participation in the whole deified Church as in the heavenly Jerusalem. The latter is only encountered through earthly mediation, and here theology is first answerable to the whole Church Militant. This involves a certain answerability to the bishop. But in what way is theology also answerable to scripture? Here, once again, clarity is possible only if one rejects post-1300 dualities.

Protestantism privileged the historical body of Christ; Trent, the sacramental body. This meant a preference either for scripture or tradition, respectively. Before Henry of Ghent, there had been no such juxtaposition. For the first time, he asked which had priority, thereby revealing that something had already changed. Now, scripture appeared as a closed book in the past that needed supplementing by a separate oral command. Basil had spoken of written and unwritten traditions, but the latter were seen by him and by later theologians as consisting in the "performance" of the text. Tradition was the handing over of the text into practice. Thus,

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Aquinas speaks of *sacra scriptura* as the sole authority for *sacra doctrina*, in a way that sounds "Protestant" by later Tridentine standards. But he is not speaking of the Protestant Bible. There was, as yet, no single printed book, but many manuscripts of different books of the Bible — usually surrounded by patristic commentary. Gregory the Great claimed that when he read and commented on the Bible, the text expanded.[36] It was up to the commentator to go on trying to achieve the Bible as the infinite "Borgesian" library spoken of at the end of St. John's Gospel, as it was equally up to the painter and producer of miracle plays. Such a Novalis-like or "Mallarmean" perspective was also presupposed by the entire practice of allegorical exegesis. This rendered theology possible by showing how Christological and ecclesial restoration of the world depended on the assumption of a divine "rhetoric of things." Things referred to in the Old Testament were already redeemed, since they pointed forward allegorically to Christ: in the "time being" after Christ, one could be redeemed because one's deeds indicated and made possible one's anagogical performances. As Certeau put it, all this depended on a sense that there were "essential" shared universal meanings between things; consequently, nominalism ensured the collapse of allegory as the real divine rhetoric and thus of the true inner basis of Christian theology. Without real intrinsic aesthetic connections, the ways of God in history became indecipherable, and one was left with a series of positive institutions, only linked as logically possible manifestations of the divine absolute power. Logical reflection on this situation was now divorced from ontology, and the rhetorical dimension of scripture and preaching was thereafter somewhat confined to mere words. The "treatise on sacred rhetoric" emerged within both a Reformation and a Counter Reformation ambience.

Certeau, however, exaggerates. His own theology seems to require the later decadent situation of bodily absence to be normative. He exaggerates the negativity of the "time being." The Church is not, as he claims, just a mystical substitute for the lost real Israel and living body of Christ. In all its physicality and placement in *cathedrae*, it is also exactly both. It only lost this positivity through the processes traced by Lubac and Certeau. Moreover, is the work of the univocalist/nominalist Antichrist within the Church to be perceived only negatively? Without lapsing into Hegelian dialectic, it can be acknowledged that catastrophe may help to see more clearly, and that the nominalist critique exposes certain faults. In

36. See Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, *op. cit.*, p. 222, citing the work of Pier Cesari Bori on Gregory the Great's reading of Ezekiel's vision.

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the face of nominalism and univocity, Cusanus argued that both realism about universals and analogical participation requires one to see the limited scope of the law of identity. For Ockham, a common essence would be in the same respect both particular and universal, and an analogous *esse* in the same respect both shared and proper.[37] Cusanus also claimed that universals are constructed through language, but that "fictionalized" universals may still exhibit something that holds in reality, albeit in a more "conjectural" fashion than hitherto acknowledged.[38] In this way, Cusanus opened new spaces for rhetoric, poetics, and the construction of history. If Boulnois is right that the Thomist paradox of the supernatural is partly inspired by the Aristotelian maxim "art imitates nature" (which is also paradoxical, because here an observation of nature also exceeds and completes it), then Cusanus' new space suggests a more explicit coincidence of grace with the art that is intellect.

Despite Certeau, such a coincidence is also found in certain exponents of sacred rhetoric. Thus, in the work of the Lutheran Mathias Flaccius Illyricus rhetoric is not reduced to ornament and propagandistic manipulation, and traditional fourfold exegesis is not totally abandoned. Instead, here one finds a fusion of a rhetoric that sustains a Longinian interest in the ways words can both reveal and enact the real through performance (Longinus may have been close to theurgic Neoplatonism), with a continued acknowledgement of the divine real rhetoric in allegory.[39] Here, the anagogic continues to "pro-duce" the past in the older sense of "lead forth," but this production now also includes a moment of the creative "production" of truth in words. Through a blending of Longinus with Augustine's rhetorical writings often repeated by both Protestant and Catholic writers, the indwelling of the Spirit is re-thought in terms of a doctrine of poetic inspiration. Biblical

37. William of Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions* 5.12 and 14. Nicholas de Cusa's interest in human participation in divine creative power can also be related to Scotus and Ockham. Given univocity, unlike Aquinas, they tend to say that creatures can fully bring about being. Thus, Ockham says that, in a sense, human beings create (QQ 2.9). Cusanus says this too, but he restores the bringing about of being in a finite thing to the context of participation and mediation that still sees being as really the effect of God alone. However, he still talks explicitly of human creation in a way Aquinas and Bonaventure did not.

38. As Libera notes, Dietrich of Freibourg and Ulrich of Strasbourg sought to save the Dominican realist legacy instead by speaking of a purely internal mental construction of the universal, thus at once returning to Plotinus and anticipating idealism. See Libera, *Introduction à la Mystique Rhenane*, *op. cit.*

39. See Debora Shuger, *Sacred Rhetoric: The Christian Grand Style in the English Renaissance* (Princeton NJ; Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 73-76ff.

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writings are considered by Flaccius Illyricus in terms of a human rhetorical construction as well as a divine allegory of the real. This was possible in terms of a Longinian perspective that saw style with the most sublimely persuasive "coiled force" to be a "brief," albeit figurative one full of *res* and a minimum of *verba*. Such a fusion of human and divine rhetoric carries right through to the Anglicans John Dennis and Robert Lowth in the 17th and 18th centuries, and thus to Hamann, and to many in the 19th century, both Catholic and Protestant, influenced by him.[40]

All such people indicate how, in times of diminution, one's task is not only to recover the pre-1300 vision, but also to acknowledge human consensus, co-operation, and varied free poetic power in a way this vision did not fully envisage. Theologians, who may be the last of the last, still have a task before them.

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40. See John Milbank, "Pleonasm, Speech and Writing," in John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 55-84.

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The Problem of Reported Speech: Friendship and Philosophy in Plato's Lysis *and* Symposium

Catherine Pickstock

Plato's discussions of love and friendship in *Lysis*[1] and *Symposium*,[2] unlike those of Aristotle, reputedly allow little place for love or affection toward individuals. This conclusion is reached through several routes; for some, it is the aporetic inconclusiveness of the discussion concerning the nature of friendship in *Lysis*; for others, it is the suggestion that love inspires one to see in the beloved something which betokens higher realities and is merely occasioned by the beloved, i.e., the lover's gaze ultimately passes beyond the specificities of human beauty.[3] In *Symposium*, Diotoma allegedly suggests that *eros* is infinitely substitutable and impersonal. It is said that Aristotle more genuinely appreciates the specificity of human affections and friendships: for the Stagirite friends are considered "the greatest of external goods"; those who have regulated their

1. Plato, "Lysis," tr. by J. Wright, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series LXII (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), pp. 145-168.

2. Plato, "Symposium," tr. by Michael Joyce, in *ibid.*, pp. 526-574.

3. Gregory Vlastos, "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato," in Gregory Vlastos, ed., *Platonic Studies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 3-42; see Catherine Osborne's excellent critique of Vlastos' position in *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), Appendix II. See also Fergus Kerr, "Charity as Friendship," in Brian Davies OP, ed., *Language, Meaning and God: Essays in Honour of Herbert McCabe OP* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), pp. 1-23; Kerr cites Aristotle, "Nichomachian Ethics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. and with an introduction by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), Bk. III, Ch. 11, 1119a, pp. 982f, Bk. IX, Ch. 9, 1169b, pp. 1088f, and 1166a, pp. 1081f.

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passions to such a degree that they are unmoved by particular instances of beauty are "simply not human."[4]

Aristotle's emphasis on friendship as "the beautiful thing"[5] has been central to recent scholarly interest in the topic of friendship. Studies have appeared in many disciplines and from many perspectives.[6] Alongside these, a number of theological accounts have addressed friendship in its late classical context or have examined medieval understandings of charity and its link with protocols of personal affiliation and friendship.[7] More recently, Jacques Derrida has produced his ambivalently-received *Politics of Friendship*,[8] in which his deconstructive impulse is applied variously from Plato and Aristotle all the way to Montaigne and Carl Schmitt.[9] There has also been an increasing engagement with classical negotiations of friendship.[10] If one situates these developments within the context of other

4. *Ibid.*, Bk. IX, Ch. 9, 1169b, p. 1088, and Bk. III, Ch. 11, 1119a, pp. 982f..

5. *Ibid.*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 1, 1155a, pp. 1058f.

6. Diego Gambetta, ed., *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Marilyn Friedman, *What are Friends for? Feminist Perspectives on Personal Relationships and Moral Theory* (Ithaca, NY: SUNY Press, 1993); Michael Theunissen, *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber*, ed. by Christopher Macann (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986); Francesco Alberoni, *L'amicizia* (Milan: Garzanti, 1984); Oliver Leaman, ed., *Friendship East and West: Philosophical Perspectives* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996).

7. B. P. McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience 350-1250* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1988); David Moss, "Friendship: St. Anselm, *Theoria* and the Convolution of Sense," in John Milbank *et al.*, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 127-142. See also Osborne, *Eros Unveiled, op. cit.*

8. Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1997); *Politics of Friendship*, tr. by George Collins (London: Verso, 1997).

9. On the controversy surrounding Carl Schmitt, see Gary Ulmen, "Between the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich: Continuity in Carl Schmitt's Thought," in *Telos* 119 (Spring 2001), pp. 17-42

10. Miriam Leonard, "The *Politiques de l'amitié*: Derrida's Greeks and a National Politics of Classical Scholarship," in *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 46 (2000), pp. 45-76; J. M. Cooper, "Aristotle on Friendship," in Amélie O. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1980), pp. 301-340; Julia Annas, "Plato and Aristotle on Friendship and Altruism," in *Mind* (1986), pp. 532-554; Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Malcolm Schofield, "Political Friendship and the Ideology of Reciprocity," in Paul Cartledge *et al.*, eds., *Kosmos: Essays on Order, Conflict and Community in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 37-51; Gabriel Herman, *Ritualized Friendship in the Greek City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Christopher Gill *et al.*, eds., *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

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debates concerning reciprocity, virtue, ethics, selfhood "in dialogue," eros, community, and gift-exchange, one can see that friendship is of considerable contemporary concern.[11]

Amid these responses to friendship, two general interpretative tendencies can be observed. The first is an emphasis on the importance of friendship in a variety of social contexts; in particular, the political implications of friendship are increasingly brought to the fore. Perhaps this emphasis can be situated within a reawakened interest in virtue, ethics, and communitarianism.[12] Against the Cartesian legacy of the isolated and depoliticized self, it focuses on the dialogic or "inter*personal*" constitution of personhood.[13]

The second tendency has underlined the aporetic nature of friendship: "*O mes amis, il n'y a nul ami.*"[14] In *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida makes the most of Diogenes Laertius' "*o philoi, oudeis philos*": how can one isolate or select a "friend" without passing through an unethical moment of "exclusion"? Does not friendship then presume non-friendship? What kind of democracy is based on covert oligarchy?[15] However, this aporetic interpretation of friendship depends on a very particular and debatable reading of the classical origins of speculation about friendship that has gained considerable currency in recent years.[16] Not only does such a reading tend to operate

11. Christopher Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); John Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," in *Modern Theology*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (January 1995), pp. 119-161; Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. by Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Osborne, *Eros Unveiled*, *op. cit.*

12. Leaman, *Friendship East and West*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-12

13. Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (London: Penguin, 1991); see also, Daniel C. Dennett, *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology* (London: Penguin, 1997); Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy*, *op. cit.*; John Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity Part One: Reciprocity Refused," in *Modern Theology*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (July 2001), pp. 335-391; Catherine J. Pickstock, "Rethinking the Self," in *Telos* 112 (Summer 1998), pp. 161-177.

14. Derrida's source is Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Aristotle* (V. 21). For the classical reference to the attribution of this quotation to Arristotle, see Leonard, "The *Politiques de l'amitié*," *op. cit.*, p. 52 n. 36.

15. The question of whether Derrida is right to suppose that contemporary democracy really develops from classical notions has been addressed by Leonard, *ibid.* The extent to which Derrida exaggerates the relation between classical notions of democracy and its dependence on operations of friendship needs also to be examined. See Jon Hesk, *Deception and Democracy in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Josiah Ober and Charles Hedrick, eds., *Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Josiah Ober, *Mass and Élite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology and the Power of the People* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

16. Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

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largely with an undifferentiated model of *philia grecque*,[17] it also diagnoses an exaltation of sameness lurking beneath all talk of reciprocity. Thus, Maurice Blanchot writes that "Greek *philia* is reciprocity, the exchange of the Same with the Same, but never an opening to the Other."[18] Despite the much-vaunted gradient of radical edge in the work of Derrida and Blanchot, they both invoke the now comfortable and conventionally received notion of *la domination grecque du Même et de l'Un*,[19] which they share with many analytic Anglo-Saxon readings of classical notions of selfhood.[20]

In the context of this wide discussion of friendship, it is sometimes frustrating to see how such theorizing — despite the predominance of alleged Aristotelian sympathies — tends to lose sight of the lived reality of the phenomenon. The actuality of friendship evaporates via claims of phenomenological impossibility or else is ossified through claims of lurking oligarchic totalizing motives. It has become rare for speculation about friendship to turn on particular friendships and encounters with particular people.[21] One development in lived reality, which might prompt one to turn eagerly to the highest and most remote theorizations one can find, is the tendency in popular culture to sentimentalize and depoliticize friendship.[22] In contrast to the presentation of friendship in Aristotle's *Ethics* or the workings of the charitable orders and networks of kinship which formed the operating principle — economically, politically, juridically, etc. — of medieval Christendom, for example, one now finds the contrived conviviality of Spice Girls and their various perpetually euphoric

17. *Ibid.*; Leonard, "The *Politiques de l'amitié*," *op. cit.*; Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic . . ., op. cit.*; Pickstock, "Rethinking the Self," *op. cit.*

18. Maurice Blanchot, *Pour l'amitié* (Paris: Fourbis, 1996), p. 35, cited in Leonard, "The *Politiques de l'amitié*," *op. cit.*

19. Jacques Derrida, "Violence et métaphysique: essai sur la pensée d'Emmanuel Levinas," in *L'Écriture et la différance* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), pp. 117-228, 122-3; see Leonard, "The *Politiques de l'amitié*," *op.cit.*

20. See Catherine J. Pickstock, *After Writing* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), Chs. 1 and 3, and Pickstock, "Rethinking the Self," *op. cit.*; Giovanni R. F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato's* Phaedrus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

21. See Montaigne, "On Friendship," in *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, here titled "On Affectionate Relationships," tr. and ed. by Michael Andrew Screech (London: Alan Lane, The Penguin Press, 1991), pp. 205-219; and David Burrell C. S. C., *Friendship and Ways to Truth* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).

22. Kerr, "Charity as Friendship," *op. cit.*; John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (London: Methuen, 1984).

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imitators, or perhaps the highly "occasional" preoccupations of the American television acquaintances who call themselves "Friends."

Is there a way of thinking about friendship which avoids theoretical condensation, on the one hand, and ineffable sentiment, on the other? The instinct of many here might be to turn to Aristotle; yet, it may be that Derrida is not altogether mistaken in noticing aporetic lacunae in his work. Aristotle may not point the way to a middle path, except in negative terms. The suggestion that, by contrast, Plato does point in this direction is likely to be greeted with skepticism: surely Plato suppresses the ultimate significance of friendship in pursuit of the good, where Aristotle sees friendship as essential to the good — which is the fully lived — life?

Is Plato really against the corporeal specificities of desire and beauty, and does he really despise the concrete circumstances of mundane love? Is Plato against all forms of mediation: human, linguistic, mythic, temporal, physical? Should contingency and everyday distraction be bypassed? Is there clearly no middle point in Plato between high theory and lived reality? Plato's presentation not just of friendship, but also of the link between friendship and philosophy, and the representation of this link in certain forms of linguistic mediation in his dialogues contain in abundance the kind of language one might dismiss as mere banter between friends — tokens of reported speech, diegetic redundancies, i.e., the kind of language which seems to be at a remove from serious discussion or high philosophy. Its usage must be linked to the presence of various other unusual "literary" devices in the dialogues. Attention to these forms casts new light on the character of Plato's philosophical treatment of friendship, which is inseparable from his conception of philosophy as a friendly activity.

This inquiry was prompted by an apparent aside in Kerr's essay "Charity as Friendship."[23] In the course of an analysis of the theory of love attributed to Diotima of Mantinea in *Symposium*, Kerr observes the way in which, by placing Diotima's doctrine in a report given by Socrates, Plato interposes a certain distance between himself and Socrates, and likewise between Socrates and Diotima.[24] Indeed, although reported speech is a feature of many of the dialogues, *Symposium* is exceptional in the sense that such "distancing" by indirect discourse is taken to an extreme. Much ink has been spilled in manifold attempts to explain why *Symposium* is presented in such a narratorially indirect way. Why is one report embedded within another, until one is quite dizzied in

23. Kerr, "Charity as Friendship," *op. cit.*, pp. 1-23.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

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trying to remember from where the report originated and to whom it is being addressed? Why does Plato begin this dialogue with so many layers of distance? Is there a link between this marked literary form and the philosophical themes of the dialogue as a whole? Can anything be learned of the nature of human affection and of philosophy? Or should such moments of idle reportage be dismissed as beguiling adornment or a rather crude attempt to obtain conversational verisimilitude?

This feature of *Symposium* is linked with Plato's concept of the link between *logos*, *eros*, and *philia*. Such a reading is suggested if one first examines the relation between form and content in an earlier dialogue, *Lysis*, which is specifically concerned with friendship. *Lysis* is generally situated among Plato's early Socratic dialogues, although it remains an open question as to when the dialogue was written.[25] It is notorious for its untidy arguments and confusing collapsed conclusion; if one attempts to disinter the logic of argument in *Lysis* for the sake of a critical meta-discursive analysis, one will find only muddle and zig-zagging perplexity.[26] How one should read the dialogue at all is not certain, but clearly its strange formal twistings need to be examined.

Put briefly, the dramatic setting is as follows: like several other Platonic dialogues, *Lysis* opens with Socrates en route to a particular place; in general, Socrates' destinations are places associated with the *polis* or its surrounding region.[27] The discussion takes place in the Palaestra, a meeting place for aristocratic Athenian youths to play sports and gain instruction. Socrates draws two friends, Lysis and Menexenos, into a discussion about the nature of friendship. At first, the questions Socrates poses appear quite straightforward: Which of you is older?[28] Which is the most beautiful? Which is the richest? The two friends jostle in nervousness and embarrassment, at which point Socrates suggests that such questions are foolish, for friends are perforce equal in everything and hold everything in common.[29] And here one senses the pall of aporia begin to spread:

25. Cf. Plato, *Lysis*, *op. cit.*; Osborne, *Eros Unveiled*, *op. cit.*, p. 58; M. M. Mackenzie, "Impasse and Explanation: From the *Lysis* to the *Phaedo*," in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 70 (1988), pp. 15-45; David Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship* (Ithaca: SUNY Press, 1979); Vlastos, "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato," *op. cit.*

26. See, e.g, Brian Carr's attempt to distill the dialogue into analytic formulae, in "Friendship in Plato's *Lysis*," in Leaman, *Friendship East and West*, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-31.

27. Plato, *Lysis*, *op. cit.*, 203a, p. 146; *Phaedrus*, tr. by R. Hackforth, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, *op. cit.*, 272a, p. 525; *Symposium*, *op. cit.*, 172a, p. 527; see also Osborne, *Eros Unveiled*, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

28. Plato, *Lysis*, *op. cit.* , 207c, p. 149.

29. *Ibid.*, 214a, pp. 156f.

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what do friends have in common? If friendship is not the play-ground banter of mutual outdoing, then what exactly is it? What makes friendship take place? Further difficult questions follow: who becomes the friend of another, the lover of a beloved, or the beloved of a lover? And are friends alike to one another? Is it the case that like seeks out like, Socrates asks, alluding to Homer and Empedocles?[30] Only those who are good, presumably, are capable of friendship, and only those who are one with themselves — or "like" themselves — can be "like" others.[31] Friends must surely be alike, otherwise friendship would be compromised by the unseemly calculations of utility, advantage, and lack, which would corrode the communal basis of a relation.[32]

But then, does this not promote the opposite argument? If one person is like another, then he has no need of him and is self-sufficient.[33] Surely, there will be here no impulse to forge friendships. Socrates cites Hesiod to suggest that envy, jealousy, and hatred arise not between unlike people, but between like people: "See potter wroth with potter, bard with bard, beggar with beggar."[34] Must not friendship pertain then between unlike persons? For do not the rich attract the poor, the strong the weak, the doctor the infirm, the wise the foolish?[35] But, taking this line of argument to somewhat sophistically absurd proportions, Socrates notes that, if this is so, then the friend presumably must attract the enemy,[36] and one's own experience tells one that such a notion cannot be sustained.

Socrates proposes a third logical possibility, which is that a person is drawn to another person who is neither like nor unlike himself;[37] he who experiences friendship with another person sees in that person a kind of future direction that takes him — through the allure of beauty — away from his own evil further into friendship with goodness, i.e., beyond his own self-identity or mundane "likeness" toward something greater that might disclose a higher selfhood, more alike than he could have imagined. This higher "likeness" is perhaps something akin to one's "potential," and

30. *Ibid.*, 214a, pp. 157f; and Homer, *The Odyssey*, with an English translation by A. T. Murray, revised by George E. Dimock (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), Vol. II, Bk. 17, p. 171: "As ever, the god is bringing like and like together."
31. Plato, *Lysis*, *op. cit.*, 214e, pp. 157f.
32. *Ibid.*, 218d-e, p. 162.
33. *Ibid.*, 222b, pp. 166f.
34. *Ibid.*, 215c, p. 158; and Hesiod, *Works and Days*, tr. by David Tandy and Walter Neale (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), p. 25.
35. Plato, *Lysis*, *op. cit.*, 215d, pp. 158f.
36. *Ibid.*, 216a-b, p. 159; cf. also 220e-f, pp. 164ff.
37. *Ibid.*, 216c-d, pp. 159f. and 222e, p. 167.

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it is for this reason that friendship involves a dynamic more complex than that driven by the circuit of mere lack or need, for the potential glimpsed in the like-unlikeness of the befriended person is not wholly other from oneself, and is not statically the same; it cannot be attained once and for all.

One begins to see just how complicated the relation of same and different really is. Far from the crude mechanical same-sameness of Derrida's attribution of equivalence in all classical exchanges or reciprocations, one finds instead a complex interplay of the one and the many, where the more one attains unity, the more manifold and multiple one's route becomes. Socrates somewhat obscures one's grasp of this by using a seemingly silly illustration: when a young man disguises himself and colors his hair grey, the grey is not present in the same way as it is for a person whose hair is naturally grey.[38] The "presence" of contrived greyness, then, is a kind of duplicitous or false secondary presence,[39] half here and half not; like the intimated potential of full likeness betokened in a friend to whom one is drawn, there is a half-presence that points beyond itself to a fuller presence. And it is significant that this half-presence should be seen in terms of an artifice that is a sign of something natural. One senses that, difficult though it might seem, one is supposed to pass through Socrates' playful sophistic examples to consider the essence of friendship.

The neither/nor of Socrates' third position suggests that in friendship one cannot be dear to a person according to the extent to which he is merely useful (*rhemati*) to that person. Rather, he must be dear in reality (*toi onti*). Thus, for friendship to pertain, there must be a primordial being-dear that lies outside the chain of things that are cherished on account of their usefulness as a means to an end.[40] If friendship depended on a calculation of such conditions, it could never be sustained; conditions are always changing, and one's capacity to fulfill those conditions never remains the same.

This can start to seem like a Kantian distinction between treating people always as ends and never as means. Yet, Plato is not doing this. He associates going beyond *rhemati* with a love that can be returned. One loves animals and children (these are ancient Greek children) rather in the manner of objects, insofar as they are useful or serve affective needs, even though they cannot, at least equally, return that love.[41] For Kant, however,

38. *Ibid.*, 217f, pp. 160ff.
39. *Ibid.*, 217e, p. 161.
40. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "*Logos* and *Ergon* in Plato's *Lysis*," in *Dialogue and Dialectic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 1-20 and 13ff.
41. Plato, *Lysis*, *op. cit.*, 210c-213a, pp. 153-156.

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the respect for a person that does not treat that person as merely useful is a one-way affair: its very test is that it abides outside mutual affection, which Kant locates beneath the ethical.[42] How then is it that, for Plato, the transcendence of objectification in the regard of the other has to do with returned love and mutuality? Does this not contaminate the purity of one's friendship with something "objective," which subverts one's affections? (This is how Levinas and Derrida would see things).

But the key here is that, in this unemphatic dialogue, Plato does not banish the useful and objective altogether from the field of friendship. He does not allow that one cannot be a friend to children and to animals, and this concurs with Stephen Clark's demonstration that Plato makes a far less sharp division between human beings, animals, and things than does Aristotle;[43] thus, in *Republic* he speaks of the "herding" of human beings.[44] In the case of children and animals, one can befriend (perhaps) without return. Yet, this means that Plato links one-way regard with (a relative) objectification and instrumentalization, whereas Kant links this sort of purified regard with the absence of instrumentalization.[45]

How is one to understand this? It is important to realize that Kant has in the background a Cartesian absolute contrast of free subject with purely factual object drained of inherent form or meaning. For Plato, by contrast, both "subject" and "objects" reflect the intelligible forms in differing degrees, and, indeed, can reflect each other.[46] Therefore, Plato's pairs and contrasts are not so absolute as are Kant's. For Plato, "objectification" and "instrumentalization" are not to be banished from the ethical sphere, since he is more concerned than Kant with the ends of use, rather than with a purity of freedom, regardless of ends pursued. Animals and children made use of through good affections by wise men are brought more within the psychic realm, rather than downgraded from subjectivity, as they would be from a Kantian perspective. It is for this reason, one may speculate, that the Kantian objection that returned affection contaminates

42. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, tr. by H. J. Paton (New York: Harper, 1964), Ch. 1; see also Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity," *op. cit.*

43. Cf. Plato, *Lysis*, *op. cit.*, 212e-213a, pp. 155f.); see also the collapsing of the terms *philia*, *eros* and *epithumia* in Plato, *Laws*, tr. by Benjamin Jowett, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, *op. cit.*, Bk. VIII, 837, pp. 1402f. See also Cummins, "*Eros*, *epithumia* and *philia* in Plato," in *Apeiron* 15 (1981), pp. 10-18.

44. Stephen R. L. Clark, *"Herds of Free Bipeds" in the Political Animal: Biology, Ethics and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

45. Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity," *op. cit.*

46. Cf. Plato, *Phaedo*, tr. by Hugh Tredennick, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, *op. cit.*, 73d and 74a, pp. 56f.

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non-objectifying love does not hold for Plato in the instance of reciprocal friendship, since even such friendship can have asymmetrical moments, which involve a certain deploying of the one by the other in such a way that opens up for the other the path of the good.[47] The lure of the beautiful does in a sense objectify the one lured. This might explain why *Lysis* does not teach that neither the unreturned love of the lover nor mutual love is paradigmatically friendship. Instead, it points out the objections to either case: in the first case, one ends up loving or being friends with enemies, and enemies are friends (contradiction);[48] in the second case, one is not the friend, i.e., the aid or helper for the good of children and animals (counter-intuitive). How does Plato indicate a way out of this aporia?

As one ascends toward friendship, one passes beyond the condition of utility and exigency toward what is truly real, to *ontos on*. Those true realities are not exactly "things we lack," for they are transcendent, and, inversely, the trinkets of utility form connections in an essential chain of mediation. The artifice of grey hair powder is of essential "use" if one is to catch a glimpse of wise old age already in appearance, and even natural aged look is but an artificial powdered dye in relation to the kind of aged wisdom one would need to understand such things fully. Therefore, one cannot simply "let go" of one's own enjoyment of mundane things in order to rise to those which are higher. In the same way, in such true friendship, sameness and difference, likeness and unlikeness, unity and multiplicity, giving and receiving, understanding of others and self-understanding, though they might seem theoretically opposed, fold into one another in the actual experience of friendship.

Although these speculations might seem too abstract to be true to such actual experience, there is a sense in which they are in fact truer to that experience than the earlier, apparently simpler explanations which Socrates successively deconstructs. And simpler too. How can this be? How is the opening up to the path of the Good, which is both and neither reciprocal and asymmetrical, really envisaged? Much is made in *Lysis* of

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47. One can think, for example, of the way in which the pupil is beholden to the philosopher who alone can trigger in the soul of the pupil a recollection of the highest realities, and thus prompt the release of the soul from the cycle of metempsychosis. For this to be possible, the philosopher's knowledge of the nature of the pupil's soul must be so intricate and perfect that it cannot be gained by mere speculative assessment; the kind of knowledge required to know a person's soul is necessarily a kind of love, for only love knows beyond itself and has the kind of intensity and depth suitable to its object. See Plato, *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*, *op. cit.*

48. Plato, *Lysis*, *op. cit.*, 213b, p. 156.

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the youthfulness of the friends under consideration; and the polemic theater of the Palaestra is one distinguished by the presence of young people and the disporting of knuckle-bones and other forms of *paidia*.[49] If one thing becomes clear in this aporetic dialogue, it is that the mechanical one-up-manship of Lysis and Menexenos cannot be taken as true friendship; it depends too much on amounts and calculations of advantage and disadvantage. At the end of the dialogue, when the discussion becomes considerably confused, Socrates sets out in search of someone "older" (*presbuteron*),[50] with whom to continue the discussion. Is it then that the question of the nature of friendship can only be asked of those who are older, just as, for Aristotle, the study of ethics demands that one has reached the age of thirty? Judging by the raucous and vain behavior of the elders who arrive at the end of *Lysis*,[51] Socrates' point is surely not that an older person is wiser by dint of mere age; indeed, the youthful Lysis shows flickers of quite solemn wisdom,[52] to no lesser degree than the pedagogues who come stumbling drunkenly into the Palaestra show signs of foolhardiness and vanity.[53] Perhaps Socrates' underlying point is that friendship does not flourish when taken out of context, and excavations are conducted to determine its essence. This point might seem obvious enough: friendship clearly exists best where the question as to the nature of friendship is not asked; just as when true friendship pertains between two persons, the last thing in the friends' minds would be how they could test this friendship to see if it is true. The estate of friendship simply does not admit of the asking of such questions.

But is there a subtler point here? Toward the end of the dialogue, Socrates appears to undergo a kind of argumentative collapse: "What other way then is left us of treating the subject? Clearly none. I therefore, like our clever pleaders at the bar, request you to reckon up all that I have said. If neither those who love or are loved, neither the like nor the unlike, nor the good, nor those who belong to us, nor any other of all the suppositions which we passed in review . . . if, I say, not one of them is the object of friendship, I no longer know what I am to say."[54] This is the kind of collapse that occurs naturally enough in the face of an aporia. But the final

49. *Ibid.*, 206e, p. 149.
50. *Ibid.*, 223, p. 167.
51. *Ibid.*
52. *Ibid.*, 210d, p. 153; cf. 212a, p. 154.
53. *Ibid*, 223, p. 167. See Plato, *Republic*, tr. by Paul Shorey, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, 328e, p. 578.
54. Plato, *Lysis*, *op. cit.*, 222e, p. 167.

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exchange of the dialogue seems to hint at the direction in which one should begin the search for an unravelling of the conundrum: "Well, Lysis and Menexenos, we have made ourselves rather ridiculous today, I, an old man, and you children. For our hearers here will carry away the report that though we conceive ourselves to be friends with each other — you see I class myself with you — we have not yet been able to discover what we mean by a friend."[55] One senses that a link between philosophy or dialectic and friendship has been indirectly revealed; that all the time that these interlocutors were engaged in their debate as to the nature of friendship, they were entering into its estate, even without knowing it. The condition of that estate is not one which is disposed to halt and question and measure and apply tests upon itself. Indeed, the aporetic inconclusiveness of the dialogue might suggest that even as one edges toward intimations of the link between this theme and the "way of life" marked out by the philosopher, so also one becomes aware of the zig-zagging haphazardness of real-life friendship, with its argumentative detours and blind alleys. If the condition of friendship has been entered into in the course of the dialogue, then perhaps Socrates' neither/nor has been successfully "proven"; for the interlocutors have paraded their mechanistic notions, and then have been drawn to confront their restricted compass. Meanwhile, they have been drawn outward and beyond those restrictions toward a certain way of life or a certain future, which, it appears from their concluding exchanges, they might share in friendship within one another.

The fact that the logic of the dialogue might offend someone and its aporia irritate someone should not necessarily suggest abandoning the dialogue as decadent and un-philosophical.[56] The interlocutors at the end of *Lysis* may be no clearer as to the definition of friendship, but that is perhaps because Socrates has tried to indicate that friendship does not admit of a definition; and because they have entered into it. It is, like philosophy, a way of life, rather than a static thing to be examined. And this is why one needs to have aged, at least in the sense of having entered into the passing of time, to gain admission into that way of life. Lysis knows he is too young to understand these things, even despite his haughtiness. But that very haughtiness is described by the expression *mega phronein*: Lysis "thinks big"; his admission of lack of age looks beyond or upward and knows there is more to come. So his youthful "unlikeness" to Socrates

55. *Ibid.*, 223, p. 168.
56. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1004b, 22, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 734f.

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betokens a kind of inchoate dynamic which looks toward a higher assimilation. This higher assimilation or future "likeness" is perhaps comically anticipated by another kind of likeness achieved by the interlocutors; they have at least become "alike" in one sense: "we have made ourselves rather ridiculous today, I, an old man, and you children."[57]

But what has been seen so far seems at odds with many commonly held notions as to the nature of philosophy in the Platonic dialogues. It is all very well to isolate an apparent link between friendship and philosophy in *Lysis*, but is not Platonic philosophy more to be associated with interior migration and the exaltation of a supra-linguistic philosophical *logos*, remote from the fray of time, language, and human distraction? Is this not the whole point of the upward gaze of the philosopher-guardian in *Republic*, or the philosopher-lover of *Phaedrus*, who neglects the ordinary day-to-day exchanges of life or the careful ordering of the human body recommended by Socrates in *Phaedo*?

One can only defend the essential place of a "literary" element in Plato's philosophy of friendship by coming to understand how friendship, whose actuality has an ineliminably discursive aspect, is essential to Plato's account of philosophy.

It would be foolish to pretend that elements of the *contemptus mundi* do not exist in the Platonic dialogues; they can be seen in the context of various dualistic notions which derive ultimately from the pervasive ancient Greek division of reality into shaping mind and form, on the one hand, and unformed material chaos, on the other.[58] But if one thing is certain about reading the Platonic dialogues, it is that one can be certain about nothing. Scholars are increasingly approaching the genre of Plato's dialogues with an interpretative caution[59] which seeks to learn

57. Plato, *Lysis*, *op. cit.*, 223, p. 168.

58. Catherine J. Pickstock, *A Short Guide to Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

59. Charles H. Kahn, "Drama and Dialectic in Plato's *Gorgias*," in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 1 (1983), pp. 75-121; Charles H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Kathryn Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas*, *op. cit.*; Charles L. Griswold, ed., *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings* (New York: SUNY Press, 1988); S. Rosen, *The Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry* (New York: SUNY Press, 1993); K. Sayre, "Plato's Dialogues in the Light of the *Seventh Letter*," in Griswold, *Platonic Writings*, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-109; D. Halperin, "Plato and the Erotics of Narrativity," in J. C. Klagge and N. D. Smith, eds., *Methods of Interpreting Plato and his Dialogues* in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, suppl. vol. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 93-129.

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not only from moments of speculative clarity (of which there are scarcely very many), but also from the use of myth, citation, generic imitation, use of rhetoric, and, indeed, the dialogue form itself. If one follows the lead of such recent developments, it becomes impossible to sustain any notion that Plato systematically denies mediation, whether inter-personal, mythical, daimonic, linguistic, or even poetic. Even *mimesis*, despite Socrates' banishment of the poets in *Republic*, is given a high status; one can think, for example, of the hierarchy of copying by which the love which pertains between the beloved and the lover is able to imitate the Forms in *Phaedrus*.[60]

Yet, despite these elements that seem to favor certain forms of mediation, one still has to fight the instinct which tells one that philosophy just is not done like that, and so the centrality of mediation is not philosophically established. Invocations of mythic tales, comical allusion, linguistic banter: these surely are decadent accretions with which one should have nothing to do. But perhaps it is arrogant to suppose that one knows where decadence reaches its last gasp and philosophy begins? Even in philosophical terms, it is not clear that the philosopher can advance to pure apprehension of unmediated truth. If one can observe, on the one hand, a certain optimism as to the scope of human knowledge, as for example in the case of the philosopher-guardians of *Republic*, who are able to be transported beyond the occlusions from knowledge in the ordinary realm, one can also observe, on the other hand, many instances where the scope of knowledge is regarded more negatively. This latter view often finds expression in a pessimism about the capacity of language to communicate such knowledge. Plato's *Seventh Letter* is frequently cited as an illustration of this view, where it seems that language is such an impoverished and partial vehicle that it renders philosophy wholly impossible.[61] How can one hope to express the intelligible realm in words?[62] Knowledge of anything comes about through names, definitions, and figures, and even knowledge is not the thing itself,[63] with the consequence that these signs

60. Plato, *Phaedrus*, *op. cit.*, 248a, pp. 494f; 252e-253b, p. 499; and 255d, p. 501. See Socrates' advocation of the use of "likenesses" in *Phaedrus,* 246a, p. 493; cf. Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato*, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-5.

61. See Sayre, "Plato's Dialogues in the Light of the *Seventh Letter*," *op.cit.*, and Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato*, *op. cit.*, p. 183n., 59.

62. Plato, *Phaedo, op. cit.*, 114d, pp. 94f.; Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato*, *op. cit.*, pp. 12 and 199.

63. Plato, *Letters*, tr. by L. A. Post, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, *op. cit.*, VII, 342b-d, pp. 1589f.

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and shapes are not really left behind.[64]

It is clear, then, that the embodied soul cannot attain unmediated contemplation of the Forms. This is not only because it cannot fully escape materiality in this life, but also because it cannot even advance toward the forms simply by escaping. Since the Forms are not to be seen once and for all, and more and more of them are disclosed in particular instances, Plato advocates not simply a leaving behind of the material, but much more a zig-zagging play between leaving-behind, returning, and remaining.[65] Unlike Plotinus later, Plato's soul in this life is never outside the forward flow of time, and, for the operation of recollection, this forward flow has a positive relation to our acts of knowing.[66] There is an implication, then, in the *Seventh Letter*, that knowledge is defective.[67] And Plato never presents Socrates as having obtained entire understanding.[68] Although Socrates is in a position to describe the philosopher's ascent from the Cave, and represents the philosopher as proceeding from the analysis of sensible objects to the perception of the intelligible realm by means of abstraction, he is only able to present these truths through analogy with the material realm.[69] Elsewhere he speaks of probabilities and possible tales, of the need for myths and figures of the soul, the cosmos and the Forms.

If for now one is bound to matter, one is also bound to time. There are many indications in the dialogues of the temporal contingency of all human endeavor, even that of dialectic. In *Phaedo*, Socrates' life is not long enough for the *logos*,[70] and his philosophizing must be broken off by necessity.[71] In *Timaeus*, the speaker asks on two occasions for a fresh beginning[72] and asks his audience to assume the conclusions of a discussion which has not yet taken place;[73] there is concern as to the fate of argument in *Republic*,[74] and the discussion of the Good must be

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64. Gadamer, "Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's *Seventh Letter*," *op.cit.*; Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-5.
65. See especially Plato, *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*, *op. cit.*
66. Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L'inoubliable et l'inespéré* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), pp. 9-56.
67. Plato, *Letters*, *op. cit.*, VII, 343b, p. 1589.
68. Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato*, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
69. Plato, *Republic*, *op. cit.*, 506c-519c, pp. 741-751.
70. Plato, *Phaedo*, *op. cit.*, 108d, p. 90.
71. *Ibid.*, 114c, p. 94.
72. Plato, *Timaeus*, tr. by Benjamin Jowett, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, *op. cit.*, 48d-49a, p. 1176, and 69a, p. 1192.
73. *Ibid.*, 61d, p. 1186.
74. Plato, *Republic*, 517b4-6.

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postponed until another occasion;[75] *Philebus* ends with a discussion from which the reader is excluded.[76]

But there are further restrictions still. If language is essential to thought, it is also unstable. This is thematized in *Cratylus*: "Speech signified everything (*to pan*) and is always moving things in circles and revolving and has two forms, true and false."[77] Socrates explains that this dual nature of language is a crucial problem: how can one distinguish between true and false speech? Falsehood lives in the majority of men,[78] and philosophers are able to come closer to truth in language than such men. And yet, if one removes the lower aspect of speech, one will destroy speech altogether. Words are images that resemble the realities they represent, and yet there remains a gap between image and reality, more in some cases than in others.[79] In the present state of affairs, resemblance must be supplemented by convention.[80] The best speech has the greatest resemblance to reality, but Socrates immediately qualifies this: it will only occur as far as possible.[81] The ideal situation would be to learn from the truth itself without the use of images, but this project may be beyond the scope of Socrates and Cratylus.[82] The philosopher has at his disposal only the sensible, conventional image of language, in which true insights can only be suggested.[83]

Given the restrictions on the compass of human knowledge caused by the nature of truth, one's own time-bound situatedness and language's own instability, it seems strange that Plato should have presented Socrates as effectively compounding the partiality and closedness of the capacity to

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75. Plato, *Republic*, 517b, Ch. VII, p. 749.

76. Plato, *Philebus*, tr. by R. Hackforth, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, *op. cit.*, 67b. p. 1150. One could perhaps add to this discussion the way in which many of the dialogues open with a marked noting of time, aspect, and place: in *Charmides*, "Yesterday evening we returned from the army at Potidaea"; in *Lysis*, "I was walking straight from the Academy to the Lyceum . . ."; in *Republic*, "I went down yesterday to the Piraeus with Glaucon . . ."; in *Parmenides*, tr. by F. M. Cornford, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, *op. cit.*: "After leaving our home at Clazomenae we arrived at Athens . . . " (*Parmenides* is narrated not by Socrates, but by Cephalus). See further Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato*, *op. cit.*

77. Plato, *Cratylus*, tr. by Benjamin Jowett, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, *op. cit.*, 408c, p. 444.

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Ibid.*, 432b, p. 466.

80. *Ibid.*, 435c, p. 469.

81. *Ibid.*, 435c-d, p. 469.

82. *Ibid.*, 439a-b, pp. 472f.

83. Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato*, *op.cit.*, pp. 182-183.

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know and to express one's knowledge by linking philosophy and friendship; in *Lysis*, a philosophical discussion is occasioned by the local circumstance of Lysis' and Menexenos' friendship, just as it is also apparently circumscribed by their own peculiarities and intellectual shortcomings. But perhaps this thematization of limitation and mediation can be seen in another way; perhaps it is only by being reconciled to local circumstances and elective affinities, that one attains a glimpse of the highest realities at all.

In *Symposium*, the presentation of this demur of language and the situatedness of human expression seems particularly marked.[84] Although there are several other dialogues which open with a similar use of "framing," none of these thematizes the framing structure to quite such an extent.[85] Apollodorus' telling of the story of Agathon's private victory celebration (which is meant to have occurred about ten years before the "frame" conversation), even if one were to abstract it from the various framings, is complicated enough; the dramatic setting of *Symposium* is presented as his third recounting of the event in three days, this time to a group of unnamed acquaintances.[86] As in the case of the Protagoras, this dramatic setting is not resumed at the end of the narrative, perhaps suggesting its indefinite continuation, or underlying the haphazardness of human communication. The date of the composition of *Symposium* is usually placed in the mid-380s; stylometric and other analyses situate the dialogue in Plato's "middle" period, alongside *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*.[87] The textual strategy of the dialogue has been much commented upon; many theories have been put forward as to the significance (or otherwise) of the complex framings of the opening exchanges, as also of the series of embedded speeches offered by the various symposiasts. Most commentators have tended to surrender any attempt to excavate a philosophical and dramatic unity within the dialogue, but perhaps a philosophical coherence resides in the textual structure.

As mentioned above, *Symposium* opens with an exchange of remarks in dramatic form, between Apollodorus, a follower of Socrates, and some

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84. See also Plato, *Parmenides*, *op. cit.*

85. See Plato, *Protagora* and *Euthydemus*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, *op. cit.*, and *Phaedo*, *op. cit.*

86. On the dramatic setting of the dialogue and its historical continuities, see Christopher Rowe, *Plato: Symposium* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips Ltd, 1998), pp. 10-11; and John A. Brentlinger, "The Cycle of Becoming in the *Symposium*," in Suzy Groden, tr., *The "Symposium" of Plato* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), pp. 1-31.

87. Rowe, *Plato: Symposium*, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11, 143, and 159; Sir Kenneth Dover, *Plato's Symposium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 10.

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unnamed listeners. Apollodorus has apparently been asked to relate the events and discussions of Agathon's victory party, a story which he has related already only two days before. This narrative forms the basis of the rest of the text, and his listeners respond to his story. This might seem straightforward enough, but the layers of narrative authority begin to become more complicated; Apollodorus was not present at Agathon's symposium, which occurred ten years before the present dramatic presentation. All he can do is recapitulate the story as it was given to him by Aristodemus, an earlier devotee of Socrates, who *had* been present. Inside Aristodemus' reported narrative, there is a further reported narrative, that which took place between Socrates and Diotima, a Mantinean prophetess.

So far, then, the text comprises a series of embedded narrative reports, each of which contains a further reported dialogue, and each receding further from the contemporary dramatic setting. Interestingly, Plato does not attempt to make the reader's task easier by dissolving the sequence of narrative frames so as to produce the effect of dramatic immediacy. To the contrary, it is almost as if Plato wishes to accentuate the layering of transmissions by emphasizing the reported nature of the accounts.[88] He does this by means of constant reporting clauses: "he said that he said" (*ephe phanai*);[89] these remind that Apollodorus is not an eye-witness, but a reporter of what he heard from Aristodemus.[90] The clauses are so plentiful that translators tend, for the sake of elegance, to omit them.[91]

The sense of confused narrative focus is heightened when one situates this complex structure in the context of the opening dramatic exchanges; for these thematize the idea of displaced authority. In the opening scene, one learns that Glaucon tells Apollodorus (in the latter's own recounting of their conversation) that someone who had heard the story of Agathon's party from Phoenix narrated it to him (i.e., Glaucon), though he had done so rather unreliably. This is why he now calls upon a further narration of the same event from Apollodorus. Glaucon also seeks to establish the

88. See Plato, *Symposium*, *op. cit.*, 174a, p. 528. Diotima's speech occupies narrative foreground. See Halperin, "Plato and the Erotics of Narrativity," *op. cit.*, p. 97.

89. Plato, *Symposium*, *op. cit.*, 174a, p. 528, 193d, p. 546.

90. *Ibid.*, 177e-178a, pp. 531f.

91. Aristodemus' speech is reported in three styles: first, there is straightforward "reported speech," as in "he said that..."; second, there is reported direct speech, where the "he said that . . ." is elided, but implied, sometimes introduced by the redundant *hoti* or *that* (see 174a, p. 528); and third, Apollodorus sometimes omits Aristodemus' mediation altogether and leaps straight over him to Socrates. See Rowe, *Plato: Symposium*, *op. cit.*, p. 130; Dover, *Plato's Symposium*, *op. cit.*, p. 80; Halperin, "Plato and the Erotics of Narrativity," *op. cit.*, p. 97.

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authority of Apollodorus' account; Socrates' own account agrees with Aristodemus' account. This seems to satisfy Glaucon. Apollodorus decides that he will narrate the story from beginning to end, as Aristodemus had related it to him.[92] We know from asides in other dialogues that Plato was aware of the redundancy of such exchanges;[93] so one must suppose that these receding narratives have some overall significance.[94] Many theories have been put forward: perhaps Plato wished to invoke an independent tradition against which one might check his portrayal of Socrates; perhaps one is encouraged not to regard the dialogues as containing self-evident facts;[95] perhaps the sequence of inset narratives is designed to dramatize Diotima's theory of *eros*, rescuing human knowledge from forgetfulness and enacting the erotic processes of emptying and renewal.[96]

If one thing stands out from the opening dramatic exchanges, it is that there is an anxiety to be true to the facts, but, equally, a sense that such truth to the facts is scarcely possible when one is dealing with events in the past. One knows that even though Aristodemus had been present at the symposium, Apollodorus had checked that his account matched Socrates' in every particular.[97] The outcome of these documentary verifications is that the presentation Plato offers is curiously advertised as the privileged and definitive version with all the various advantages of the written text.[98] And yet, the authority of this version is unsettling; it is in a sense too proud of itself. But perhaps this is part of a more serious point, namely, that, like the comings and goings of *eros*, the ebb and flow of the narrative authority in this dialogue dramatizes human epistemological instability or the precariousness of one's acquaintance with truth. Throughout *Symposium*,[99] one is reminded that although a discussion may be illuminating and disclosive, there is always something occasional and contingent about it, dependent upon the

92. Plato, *Symposium*, *op. cit.*, 172b-174a, pp. 527f.

93. See Plato, *Theaetetus*, tr. by F. M. Cornford, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, *op. cit.*, 143b, p. 848.

94. Halperin, "Plato and the Erotics of Narrativity," *op. cit.*, p. 100-1.

95. Dover, *Plato's Symposium*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

96. Halperin, "Plato and the Erotics of Narrativity," *op. cit.*, p. 102.

97. Plato, *Symposium*, *op. cit.*, 173b, p. 528.

98. See Plato, *Phaedrus*, *op. cit.*

99. Plato, *Symposium*, *op. cit.*, 208a, pp. 560ff: ". . . And the application of this principle to human knowledge is even more remarkable, for not only do some of the things we know increase, while some of them are lost, so that even in our knowledge we are not always the same, but the principle applies as well to every single branch of knowledge. When we say we are studying, we really mean that our knowledge is ebbing away. We forget, because our knowledge disappears, and we have to study so as to replace what we are losing, so that the state of our knowledge may seem, at any rate, to be the same as it was before."

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reports of certain people, responding to the interests of particular human preferences, arising at a specific time and place, etc.

If such a conclusion is correct, then it might shed light on Plato's frequent recourse to different forms of mediation: literary, linguistic, mythical, daimonic, rhetorical, and dialogic. There are two possible reasons for this: First, the restrictions on one's capacity to know are very great, and one's attempts to present knowledge in a neutral and transparent fashion are vain. Thus, an appeal to a variety of partially disclosive mediations is an expression of this reality. Furthermore, their quality of partiality and open-endedness is far truer to the transcendent nature of the highest truth, since it cannot be circumscribed, than any abstract or apparently simple form of expression could be.[100] Second, if one examines these various forms of mediation, it becomes more difficult to sustain any notion that, for Plato, knowledge must arise by way of the individual's esoteric turning within himself. In *Phaedrus*, for example, Socrates turns to a proliferation of external authorities: "alien streams," which fill him like a pitcher;[101] the promptings of his mysterious daimon; the wise men of old. (In the dialogues, Socrates denies his own authorship).[102] These elements of exteriority might also explain why Socrates insists that wisdom should never be exchanged for money, since wisdom is not one's own, and wisdom's integrity requires the non-contamination of the currency of conversation.[103]

Many of these sources of truth seem unreliable, multiple, and various; each myth will have many different versions and receive a variety of interpretations, and the oneiric promptings of the daimon scarcely qualify as singularly identifiable or clear-cut. But rather than being seen as the meanderings of an unphilosophical or muddled mind, one could situate their dislodged or strange character in a different context; for do they not dramatize the problem of human knowledge and the impossibility of verification? In

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100. Thus, Timaeus, for example, can only offer "probable" accounts of the genesis of the cosmos, in Plato, *Timaeus*, *op. cit.*, 29d, p. 1162; 67d, p. 1191; and 68d, p. 1192. Note also that *Timaeus* opens with a prayer warning us about the limitations of language: 27c-29d, pp. 1161f.

101. Plato, *Phaedrus*, *op. cit.*, 235c-d, p. 483, 268c, p. 514, 271c, and 275c, pp. 520f.

102. *Ibid.*, 235c-d, p. 483; and 243a-244, pp. 490f; Plato, *Symposium*, *op. cit*, 201d, pp. 553f; Plato, *Philebus*, *op. cit.*, 20b, p. 1096; and Plato, *Phaedo*, *op. cit.*, 114d, pp. 94f. L. A. Kosman notes the significance of Plato's own silence in the dialogues. See "Silence and Imitation in the Platonic Dialogues," in Klagge, *Methods of Interpreting Plato*, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-92.

103. See Plato, *Republic*, *op. cit.* Bk. I, 345e-346a, pp. 594f. and 347b, p. 596f.; and also *Greater Hippias*, tr. by Benjamin Jowett, pp. 1534ff. See Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue*, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-8. Halperin notes that "gossip" becomes a kind of parodic external authority in the *Symposium*. See p. 107

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other words, the proliferation of authorities and disclosures express a concern for the conditions for truth in language, a concern which arises, because of the gap between the sensible and intelligible realities.[104]

A crucial aspect of this acknowledgement of the restrictions upon knowledge is the necessity of being true to one's own situation, which includes acknowledging one's specific affinities and preferences, even though this will necessitate various apparently arbitrary exclusions. Such sensitivity might seem to lend one's pursuits a quite unnecessary instability; and yet, such an instability is in some ways far sturdier than any attempt to bypass such vicissitudes. Why? Because if one tries to circumvent contingency and preference, one must exercise an enforced abstraction from reality and a denial of one's finite ontological status. It is clear that such an abstraction depends on a far greater arbitrariness than that occasioned by one's own affiliations. A commitment to local circumstance will involve an acknowledgement that philosophy is not a matter of abstract definitions and an isolation of essences from the flow of time, but a way of life and a commitment to truth.

Of course, if the reported speech of *Symposium* reminds one of the occasional nature of all human philosophical endeavor, and of the vanity of all attempts to disinter accurate facts about reality, this suggests that all human speculation is subject to perpetual zig-zagging and changes of course. To suggest that one must pursue one's commitments might seem an unsatisfactory counter-balancing of all these other vicissitudes — something rather like Heidegger's "resoluteness." But *Lysis* and *Symposium* suggest a further way in which one's search for knowledge and linguistic expression can be stabilized. In *Lysis*, friendship arises not as a self-canceling circuit of lack and supply, but more as a pathway of future harmonic assimilation-with-difference. This future is seen to be impelling an individual to fulfill one's own potential and to become more oneself, but without in any way becoming fixed. It is as if the affiliation between two people in friendship, even though it depends upon a certain exclusivity, since one cannot be friends with everyone in equal degree,[105] nonetheless causes a kind of outward-bending or openness. This has very important implications not only for the individual and his friend, but also for the community, since it is through friendship that discord can be

104. Plato, *Cratylus*, *op. cit.*, 408c, p. 444, 432b-d, pp. 466f., 440c, p. 474 and 439 a-b, pp. 472f. See Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato*, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-5, 38-44, 54-58, 116-119, and 287f.

105. Cf. Plato, *Symposium*, *op. cit.*, 210a-b, pp. 561f.

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resolved and harmony established,[106] not only between the parts of the human body, but between the body and the soul, one person and another person, and, by extension, throughout the community.[107] This can be linked with the presentation in Diotima's speech of *eros* as a principle of mediation between the divine and the earthly realms,[108] the one and the many: "being midway between, [eros] makes each supplement the other, so that the whole is combined into one."[109] The shuttlings of *eros* seem to carry unity beyond itself, making it harmoniously compatible with the manifold, while it also seems to commit multiplicity to a certain direction.[110] In this way, the specificity of love in friendship can be seen as a visible expression of the link between the one and the many, the intelligible and the material, order and disorder, which in the later dialogues is revealed in the participation of the Forms in each other, and not just in our participation in the Forms. In abstract form, these pairings stand in opposition, but when they unfold in the passage of time and in the context of freely expressed preferences, the opposition resolves into a perfect combination of sameness and difference which eludes explanation and yet can be experienced by everyone.[111]

So, when *Symposium* repeatedly reminds of the precariousness and partiality of the attainment of truth by the reporting clauses and other expressions of philosophical and linguistic restriction, it perhaps also reminds one that the friendship in which such exchanges are grounded is the condition of possibility for the attainment of truth in the first place. At the point where friendship is friendship, because it moves outwards to constitute the *polis*, it seems also to do the work of the *logos*, and opens human beings toward the Forms.

In contemporary debates about friendship, and in particular Derrida's aporetic treatment, the problem is the seeming tension between fraternity and democracy. Democracy commands fraternity, and yet renders the privileging of certain people suspicious, even though one can only

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106. Cf. Plato, *Lysis*, *op. cit.*, 207c, p. 149, and Plato, *Symposium*, *op. cit.*, 186a-187a, pp. 539f.

107. Cf. *ibid.*, 188a, pp. 542f., and 197d, pp. 549f. There is an interesting parallel here between Plato and Pythagorean tradition. See Iamblichus, *On the Life of Pythagoras*, tr. by Thomas Taylor (Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 1999), pp. 281-282.

108. Plato, *Lysis*, *op. cit.*, 202e, p. 555.

109. *Ibid.*

110. *Ibid.*, 188c-d, p. 541.

111. *Ibid.*, 212a, pp. 563ff; see also Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, tr. by Norman Madarasz (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 83 and 104.

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acquaint oneself with people one by one.[112] Human rights without fraternity would be abstract and unenacted, yet as soon as they are enacted, they seem to transgress the formal universality and neutrality which constitutes these rights as rights.[113] So there is an equal modern imperative to befriend and not to befriend. For Derrida, this seems to concur in some ways with the view that one can infer from Aristotle that one should only be friends with the dead.[114] Necrophilia is the only morally unambiguous stance, since for Aristotle one is to love only the good, but the verdict "good" properly falls only on the completely lived life of many swallows and a few summers. Moreover, friendship consists, for Aristotle, more in the act of loving than that of being loved. Yet, one cannot really be friends with absent people, since Aristotle also insists that friendship is a matter of reciprocity, whose pleasure (which is crucial to it) consists in what comes from the friend as friend, and not from the friend as useful object.[115] Nevertheless, only relation to an absent Good seems to arise above the exercise of preference and prejudice and cannot be contaminated by advantage. Therefore, the aporia of rights and fraternity (where each needs the other and yet cannot have the other) is also the aporia of ideal absence versus enacted presence.

According to Derrida, there is a second aspect to the aporia of enacted friendship in Aristotle. One must have friends who are virtuous, and one should love the virtuous only, i.e., one should love those who exhibit universal human qualities. Yet, Aristotle also says that friendship arises as something spontaneous in addition to its preconditions of *habitus*, which include established virtue and natural admiration for virtue. Beyond habit, for Aristotle, as Derrida points out, there is "confidence" in friends that is only established by time. That Aristotle has in mind here something supplementary and contingent seems proven by the fact that there can be no primary friendship between human beings and God, the latter being outside the work of time.[116] But such a supplement does not seem to add so much as to transgress: a frivolous preference for certain virtuous people appears to contaminate the universal love of virtue. Primary friendship is also not possible between adults and animals and children: even though

112. Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, *op. cit.*, pp. 227-270.
113. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-112.
114. *Ibid.*, pp. 7 and 13.
115. Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, tr. by H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), VII, 2, 1237b, 1-10.
116. *Ibid.*, VII, 2, 1237b, 10-27; Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

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one can love objects in Aristotle, these cases lack the reciprocity of shared virtue and so the pleasure of exchanged equality.

A third aspect is also considered. In the case of Plato, *Lysis* intimates a tension between love merely given and love circulated. Aristotle, by contrast (with his lower doctrine of animals, women and children confined to the *oikos*, in contrast to Plato's *kallipolis*, where the whole polis is "herded" by the philosopher-guardians), construes friendship more in terms of reciprocity, and confines one-way generosity to the nonetheless supreme virtue of magnanimity, even though he still accords primacy to friendship given over friendship received.[117] The fully virtuous man must be magnanimous and have friends; yet, for Derrida, a certain hidden tension arises here: is not pure virtue under one's control as magnanimity, whereas it comes by moral luck in the case of friendship? But is it virtuous magnanimously to offer friendship or not? Plato's question in *Lysis*, unasked by Aristotle, arises for Derrida in relation to Aristotle: is not an offer of friendship friendship? But if it is spurned, how can it be friendship? Again, there is a tension between the universal possibility of offering, which is within one's power, and the specific instance of friendship, which is not, and yet, as moral luck, seems necessary to complete the ethical as absolute obligation to be effective in the particular instance.[118]

Derrida then extends this threefold aporia, somewhat like Socrates, into its extreme consequences: if one chooses one fork of the divided way, one will find that the true friend is the enemy who does not love back, and yet is not one's friend, because he is an enemy; if one chooses instead the other fork, one finds that one should love the familiar and be true to our affinities; but since the familiar friend is not yet dead, he remains unknown, and one may lose oneself and one's virtue through the mis-prison. And so, it is safer to love the enemy, "my true friend," concludes Derrida, following William Blake.[119]

Despite his discovery of aporias in Aristotle, Derrida still sees Aristotle as more proto-democratic than Plato. He reads Aristotle as saying that there is no Platonic friend or form of friendship, and only friends in the plural.[120] Even though there is a multiple tension in Aristotle between the universal and the particular — of the kind just described in its threefold

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117. For a detailed account of reciprocity in Aristotle, see Robert Sokolowski, "Friendship and Moral Action in Aristotle," in *Journal of Value Inquiry* 35 (2002), pp. 501-520.
118. Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-75.
119. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-49.
120. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

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aspect — even this tension points to a post-Kantian tension which democracy cannot avoid, between difference and the universal categorical imperative, where both need and yet refuse each other. What can democracy do but engage in this aporetic shuttle?[121]

Yet, can the Platonic zig-zag of friendship and dialectics offer an alternative to this deconstruction of Aristotle? In a way, it does seem that Aristotle is situated half-way between Plato and Kant, even though his parity is far greater with the former. For Kant, one cannot be "friends" with things (or owe categorical respect to them — though this is purer than friendship for Kant), nor with less than autonomous human beings. Even though this would be a one-way relationship, it would not be disinterested, since it would involve a coalescence between the thing or less-than-subject (since things are "objects" as the reductive correlative of the representing subject) and oneself. For Aristotle, like Kant, one also cannot be friends with things in the full sense, though friendly love for them is certainly more significant here than for Kant.[122] One can only enjoy primary friendship with other male, wealthy, and so relatively autonomous rational animals. However, unlike Kant, Aristotle maintains that in its ideal form this relationship involves reciprocity. One might be tempted to see this mutuality as escaping Kant's formalism, yet in some ways it anticipates it: what circulates in this mutuality is predominantly the same general virtue and love of the same good. Moreover, Aristotle emphatically privileges, within reciprocity, the giving over the receiving of love, and, in this way, he tends to conclude to one side of the aporia, in favor of autonomy and magnanimity (and "rights," one can say anachronistically) and subordinates the chances of affinity and the event of fraternity (with the same anachronism). This is why he also celebrates the disinterested love of the mother who hands her children over to the care of a nurse. Here, as for Plato in *Lysis*, one-way love is also friendship. However, Aristotle's example concerns disinterest rather than Plato's element of "deploying" in a sense that must be distinguished from mere utilitarian "use," or Plato's notion of "rising upwards" — for indeed nurture has been farmed out.[123] To escape formalism, one has to go beyond both

121. *Ibid.*, pp. 227-308.

122. It was noted above that, for Plato, we can be friends with all that is psychic, even if it does not have full human subjectivity. See Plato, *Lysis*, *op. cit.*, 212e-ff, pp. 155ff.

123. Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, VII, 3, 1238b, 15-1239b; Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, *op. cit.*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 5, 1158a31, p. 1065, and, 1159a9, p. 1066.

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Kant's one-way regard of the other and Aristotle's symmetrical reciprocity. Perhaps a balance can be found in Plato, for whom there is an ethical one-way[124] — as seen in the dynamic of lover and beloved in the *Phaedrus,* where it is unclear how the beloved could ever reciprocate[125] — which, unlike Kant, involves a certain action upon the other in his objectivity, and which thereby extends friendship also to things, even though there remains an hierarchical scale from unsouled things to the higher modes of soul.[126] This is not Aristotle's maternal disinterested abandoning, but rather a bonding with the lower thing or person for the sake of its elevation. In Plato, the zig-zag between the mutual and the one-way offering of love is also, with astonishing philosophical rigor, the zig-zag between seeing the other as subject and as object. The latter is not so shocking if one is willing to meet the other in his visibility and if one remembers that for Plato, there is an ethically right mode of blending with things as well as persons.

This reflection tends to reveal that, compared with Plato, Derrida is somewhat confined by all-too-modern contrasts of the subject and the object. These have some very discrete beginnings in Aristotle, in that he distinguishes ethics as the sphere of the inter-human, from theoretical knowledge, which embraces also things. Likewise, Aristotle confines friendship to the immanent realm, whereas Plato speaks directly of friendship with the divine.[127] This does not, as Derrida supposes, mean that Plato is doomed to subordinate particular friendship in time to the universal. Rather, it means that Plato points to a dimension of the not-fully-knowable-outside-desire, which one can take as an horizon for the integration of the oscillation between universal and particular, like and unlike, subject and object of love. Also, the Platonic notion of friendship with the divine is the exact counterpart of his notion of friendship with things, and his stronger notion of friendship with animals, children, and pupils (compared with that of Aristotle). It is Plato's divine hierarchy which renders him more materialist than Aristotle, and more concerned with a kenotic descent (even if his divine is still but a mute lure) compared with Aristotle's immanentist etherealization of *philia.* Since one

124. Plato, *Lysis*, *op. cit.*, 212eff., pp. 155ff.

125. One always wonders what Socrates gets out of his philosophical exchanges, since his interlocutors always seem so unequal to him in intellectual scope.

126. See especially the adoration of the beloved in Plato, *Phaedrus*, *op. cit.*

127. Plato, *Symposium*, *op. cit.*, 212a, p. 563; also, 202e, p. 555. See also Plato, *Phaedrus*, *op. cit.*

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can elevate things,[128] God can elevate mortals, and friendship takes on the character of a cosmic, ontological bond. Furthermore, Plato does not allow that for mortals it is superior to be the subject rather than the object of friendship. Since mortals are all objects of the divine lure, this means that Plato can exalt receptivity and openness to the Other in a way impossible for Aristotle, who is much nearer to a doctrine of pure autonomy.[129]

Therefore, whereas Aristotle's universal virtue of love will tend to fall into a contradictory relation with the contingent, as Derrida discerns, Plato's transcendent good welcomes the particular in its mysterious archexemplarity, and, inversely, the particular in its surprising openness always betokens a way to the transcendent.

Derrida is, nevertheless, aware that one might associate the transcendent with the particular. What he seems less inclined to consider is the way the transcendent might speak with a "middle voice" between the universal and the particular in an analogical zig-zag, rather than an aporetic shuttle. For Derrida, any association of the transcendent and the particular means "religion" and the "theologico-political," which assumes an arbitrary making-divine via a projection of "this friend," which means one's family, one's race, one's nation, etc. And yet, for Derrida, there is no way out of this aporia; it is Derrida who must accept commitment to an ineluctably racist moment. But for Plato, preference need not be "racist." Rather, the specificity of friendship as friendship raises mortals to the divine, because it is in the very nature of friendship to enter into the gift of the other as psyche which elevates one in its very specificity to the universal. Choice, election, arising affinity are only arbitrary if one does not believe that time participates in the eternal; if one does, then friendship, as specific and ineffable, mediates the nomic and the anomic.

Christianity says a similar thing more specifically, and says it is true for all human beings, when it declares that beyond the law of commandment there is the law of charity, even though love cannot be commanded, but arrives. For Aquinas, charity is friendship, as Fergus Kerr has elaborated,[130] and one enters into this friendship through grace; one cannot

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128. One can note here the way "unlike" objects can be likened or non-identically assimilated to a person with whom they are associated through *eros*; see Plato, *Phaedo*, *op. cit.*, 76a, p. 59, 74d, p. 57, and 73d, p. 56.

129. One perhaps can note here the way human beings are described as "puppets" and as put together as a "plaything" (*paignion*) of the gods in Plato's *Laws*, *op. cit.*, Bk. I, 644d, p. 1244. See also 804b, p. 1375: "puppets in the main, though with some touch of reality about them, too." See also 644d-645b, pp. 1244f. and 803b-ff, pp. 1374ff.

130. Kerr, "Charity as Friendship," *op. cit.*

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simply will it, though one must also will it. Beyond Aristotle, Aquinas sees friendship (charity) as itself the form of the virtues, and so the mutuality of same in different becomes the end of virtue, and friendship ceases to be sharing in "the same" virtue.[131] Implicitly, this takes one back to Plato (though to texts of which Aquinas knew nothing). If the goal is mutuality and blending, then friendship now coincides with justice and only occurs where universal and particular are in balance. Also, since the creation is the work and object of divine charity, a friendship with things — as St. Francis realized — is again understood. For this outlook, the specificity of friendship can only lie within distributive justice and, as Plato saw, it is cosmic and ontological. If this has been hidden, then it is re-instated when, in the Incarnation, God is shown to be charity or friendship in His own inward being. This could not be revealed as a general idea, but could only arrive as a life, as an event, including the event of entering into friendships through the offering of gifts and the experiencing of particular attachments and affinities. (John is the most loved disciple; Jesus requires Peter to love him most of all).

The Platonic dialogues and the Gospels both suggest that one can make friends and enter into preferences without injustice, because reality truly perceived is the ceaseless arrival of a network of interlocking affinities; friendship is the way to be "judicious," to discover one's own place in this arrival. In consequence, friendship is political in a way that goes beyond aporias. It anticipates the interplay of same and different in the mind of God, and a Beatific vision that, as Augustine shows at the end of the *City of God*, can only be enjoyed by the assembled collection of resurrected bodies bound together in charity.

For Aquinas, charity is the work of grace; it is a supernaturally infused virtue. All too often, Christian theology has seen this as an extrinsic fact in relation to the ethical practice of charity.[132] Yet, here Plato's vision is immensely instructive. Friendship occurs only as the mediation of the arrival of the divine, and as the opening to the divine in the Other who is both like and unlike, as unable to reciprocate in kind, and yet as responding in mutuality. This escapes the Aristotelian stifling sense that friendship happens only between equally well-educated male adults; friendship that stoops lower and abases itself is able to reposition everything that falls within its compass; through friendship, one ecstatically exceeds mere humanity.

This may be the crux of the matter. Aristotle's view is too humanist;

131. See Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, *op.cit.*, pp. 74ff.
132. See Cornelius Ernst, *The Theology of Grace* (Dublin: Mercer Press, 1974).

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and Derrida, despite Heidegger, offers a deconstructed humanism. To proffer a philosophical humanism is to remain in the space of "pure nature," which early modern theology inverted for philosophy out of its piously-motivated desire to preserve grace as "extra" to human reason. Within this space, as Jean-Yves Lacoste points out in his brilliant interpretation of Henri de Lubac, it was supposed to discover a "natural beatitude" which corresponded to what the good pagans had been able to work out.[133] Instead, of course, only philosophers who were really theologians discovered this, while the rest either naturalized or historicized Christian beatitude, or else rediscovered Stoic resignation to immanence in one mode or another (Neitzsche, Heidegger). This was inevitable, Lacoste argues, because "pure nature" was only allowed to mean that which lies within the evident capacity of one's will or reason.[134] Such capacity was thought to extend to full knowledge of God, within a baroque Christian account of human reason that was idolatrous and rightly rejected by the "Philosophy Faculties" the doctrine of pure nature had helped to establish. Where, by contrast, Aquinas had accorded a natural knowledge of God to pagan philosophers, this was a much more apophatic matter and assumed that human reason was already remotely instigated by our natural desire for the supernatural, whose centrality for Aquinas was reinstated by Lubac. Within the latter perspective, as Lacoste argues, since there is no pure nature, there is also no notion of a philosophy that would define human nature only in terms of what is possible for human reason and will and in terms of its being toward death.[135] To put this more simply: it did not conceive of a philosophy for which there was no truth in hope.

But what notion of the natural orientation to the supernatural suggests is that the key to humanity lies in exceeding humanity, which, if it is natural, as given, must also be supernatural as exceeding. Theology makes hope and desire hermeneutically primary. And so it makes that which exceeds what one is capable of by will and reason ontologically primary. An anticipated absence is more crucial than a presence which "metaphysical reason" (in the modern sense) might hope to grasp. Lacoste goes on to point out that if desire is in this way primary, then something which is rooted in the body is also primary.[136] The promptings of the body beyond

133. Jean-Yves Lacoste, "Le désir et l'inéxigible: préambules à une lecture," in *Les Etudes Philosophiques* 2 (1995), pp. 223-246.
134. *Ibid.*
135. *Ibid.*
136. *Ibid.*

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the capacities of one's own reason and will yield a more emphatic eschatology and final presence before the transcendent: the resurrection of the body, of which only the body, and not reason, could have dreamed, is proclaimed a reality by revelation.

If the pagan philosophers did not yet operate in the space of "nature," since they did not yet know of the supernatural, then they should not be read as if they were philosophers in the modern sense, exploring the limits of human and finite capacity, but often rather as expressing the natural desire for beatitude, however inchoately. And here the Platonic presentation of friendship helps one understand Christian charity, since Plato proclaimed a *logos* that existed only in the opening of one's own capacities to new things made possible by the other, and saw this as an unlimited possibility extending upwards to encounter the divine. He saw also that this impulse toward friendship was rooted in passionate corporeality, and expressed itself kenotically in reaching downwards toward things as well as upwards through the psyche. He helps one to see just how charity as friendship is a higher mode of reasoning. Charity reveals itself again, even today, in the Platonic zig-zag.

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Relationality: The Gift After Ontotheology

Mary-Jane Rubenstein

In the wake of Martin Heidegger's exposure of the "onto-theo-logical" constitution of metaphysics — particularly as filtered through Jacques Derrida's critique of the "metaphysics of presence" — there have been attempts to defend or attack the very possibility of theology.[1] Those who insist that French and German theory obstructs any theological project operate under the assumptions that: 1) any metaphysical endeavor is onto-theological, and 2) all theology is "metaphysics."[2] Conversely, those who maintain that there *can* be a non-ontotheological theology, although their projects can be very different from one another, share a concern to untangle theology from metaphysics, or at least from the kind of metaphysics destroyed by post-Heideggerian thought. Such theological strategies, far from being merely defensive, function offensively as well, viewing the

1. In addition to the texts referenced throughout this article, see Thomas Altizer *et al.*, eds., *Deconstruction and Theology* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982); John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997); Thomas Carlson, *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," in Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, eds., *Derrida and Negative Theology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992); Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997); Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998); Mark Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Mark Taylor, "Denegating God," in *About Religion: Economies of Faith in Virtual Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 29-47; Denys Turner, *God* (London: SCM Press, forthcoming); and Merold Westphal, ed., *Post-Modern Philosophy and Christian Thought* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999).

2. For a full outline of this position, see Carl Raschke, "The Deconstruction of God," in Altizer *et al.*, *Deconstruction and Theology*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-33.

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ontotheological critique as an opportunity to root out the sort of facile theologies that, as Derrida has emphasized, repress absence, difference, unthinkability, and negativity, thereby covering over any difficulty with the divine transcendental signified.[3] It has been suggested that this ontotheological impulse belongs not to theology, but to Enlightenment rationality, so that divorcing theology from ontotheological metaphysics would not only save theology from the Continental trash-bin, but would also liberate the discipline from the tyrannical "God of the philosophers."[4]

What this non-ontotheological theology might look like is a point of contention, but most people agree that the root of the problem is the equation of God with Being. Such an identification yields a circumscribed, conceptual, pre-comprehended "God" of human design (and does not do justice to Being either). Recently, Jean-Luc Marion has argued that God can only be God if He is "without Being," i.e., that God must utterly transcend all metaphysical categories.[5] Marion therefore calls for a substitution of "love" for "Being." For Marion, loving God-as-love might quell the ontological impulse to think God-as-Being. Such a *theo*logy (as distinct from theo*logy*) would be driven by an unthinkable "pure gift" of love. According to Marion, a non-ontotheological theology would be a theology of the gift. This, however, is a difficult concept, and while such a difficulty might condition theology's delivery from ontotheology, the very possibility of gift-giving (especially "pure" gift-giving) has been questioned.[6]

Two strands converge here. The first is the possibility of a non-ontotheological theology, and the second is the possibility of the gift. For the sake of argument, "relation" may be their point of convergence. Only a primacy of relationality can push theology out of ontotheology, and the gift out of impossibility, thereby allowing the emergence of a theology of the gift. Also for the sake of argument, this investigation will be carried out via a predominantly Christian theological perspective. Not wishing, however,

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3. Derrida's early work is particularly hostile to "theology" of all sorts, but as he began to investigate negative theology, he did concede that such thought "does not let itself be easily assembled under the category, 'ontotheology-to-be-deconstructed'." See Jacques Derrida, "Letter to John P. Leavey," in *Semeia*, Vol. 23 (1982), p. 61.

4. This phrase is not used as a redundancy. Since metaphysics is not exhaustively onto-theological, Being is not always Being-as-presence.

5. Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, tr. by Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

6. In addition to the Derridean, Marionian, and Milbankian texts discussed here, see John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999); and Alan Schrift, ed., *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity* (New York: Routledge Press, 1997).

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to replace one metanarrative with another, there is no suggestion here that Christianity (or, in fact, theology) provides the only framework for a reconsideration of the gift, or the only escape out of ontotheology.

The Critique of Ontotheology

According to Heidegger, the entire history of Western metaphysics is blind to the condition of its own possibility. Set into motion by Being and primarily concerned with Being, metaphysics has actually yet to *address* Being; metaphysics "refers to Being and means beings as beings."[7] Metaphysics mistakes the ontic for the ontological, assuming Being to be nothing more than the everyday being of beings. This criticism is addressed to the post-Enlightenment, Western metaphysical legacy, particularly as consummated by Hegel, for whom the ontic and the ontological eventually merge in consciousness' return to itself. When Hegel proclaimed the collapse of the *noumenal* realm, he announced a corresponding annulment of human finitude. The relegation of the infinite is bound up with an elevation of the finite; the former becomes the latter, so that the latter can become the former, and everything finite is eventually resolved into the infinite. Through the dialectical movement of history, finitude, mortality, ignorance, and time itself are all systematically overcome, so that nothing that exists is extra to human consciousness. All Being is the being of beings. This ontic/ontological identification at the height of consciousness signals the incorporation of all difference, which, for Heidegger, is the height of "onto-theo-logy." Hegel's failure to think absolute (i.e., unassimilable) difference undermines both the finitude of the finite and the infinity of the infinite, leaving metaphysics a deluded science of beings masquerading as Being. Heidegger's project of "overcoming metaphysics" is therefore one of "recalling Being,"[8] which is only possible through a resuscitation of the forgotten ontological difference between Being and being, i.e., a restoration of both infinity and finitude as such.[9]

Metaphysics has yet to think ontologically. What this means for theology is that metaphysical talk of God as Being is irremediably anthropomorphic; the God of metaphysics is not Being at all, but rather a being

7. Martin Heidegger, "The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics," tr. by Walter Kaufman in Walter Kaufman, ed., *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: Meridian Books, 1975), p. 211.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

9. Being-toward-death, Heidegger's restoration of the absolute difference of irreducible *finitude* — one's own death as the limits of being — is therefore also a re-opening of the *infinite* as such.

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among beings. The *causa sui* might be the conceptual cause of all beings, but it does not thereby attain the status of Being. This, for Heidegger, is ontotheology: confining God to the ontic realm by projecting the ontic as the ontological. This failure to think ontologically is endemic to metaphysics, so any theology that aims to think "God" in a non-idolatrous fashion[10] will need to be non-metaphysical. And although Heidegger always maintained he was not (or not *still*, depending on one's translation[11]) writing a theology, thinking outside metaphysics was and remains his challenge to the discipline: "Will Christian theology make up its mind one day to take seriously the word of the apostle [Paul] and thus also the conception of philosophy as foolishness?"[12]

The most thorough response to this injunction can be found in Marion's recent work, for whom the "internal crisis" of metaphysics is precisely what will enable thought finally to be extra-metaphysical. Having collapsed the rational idols of metaphysics, the death of God conditions the emergence of a "God who is free from onto-theology."[13] Marion contends that, while Heidegger saw this possibility, he was ultimately unable to elude the constraints of his own critique, and failed to liberate "God" from the ontotheological thinking that keeps Him within quotation marks. Marion formulates this argument in two ways. In *God Without Being*, he argues that Heidegger subsumes God under the category of Being, thereby relapsing into metaphysical idolatry. In *The Idol and Distance*,[14] he demonstrates that, in the ante-metaphysical meeting (the "event" or *Ereignis*[15])

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10. In a manner that resists Feuerbach's critique: "It is *man* who is the *original model* of his idol" (as cited in Marion, *God Without Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 16).

11. Derrida, for example, has translated the declaration, "*Wenn ich noch eine Theologie schreiben würde, wozu es mich manchmal reizt, dann dürfte in ihr das Wort 'Sein' nich vorkommen*" as both "If I were *yet* to write a theology, as I am sometimes tempted to do, the word 'being' ought not to appear there," and, more recently, "If I were *still* writing a theology — I am sometimes tempted to do that — the expression 'Being' should not figure in it." See Mark Taylor's gloss on this in his "nO, nOt, nO," in Coward and Foshay, *Derrida and Negative Theology*, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

12. Heidegger, "The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics," *op. cit.*, p. 218.

13. Marion, *God Without Being*, *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

14. Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, tr. by Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

15. Frequently translated as "event of appropriation." In his later writing, Heidegger moved away from the ontological distinction laid out in *Being and Time*, toward Being as gift-event, reflecting upon the over-determination of "*es gibt*" as both "there is" and "it gives." Recalling *Ereignis*, the happening of Being in time becomes the Heideggerian imperative, and recollection thus becomes a reception. And when Being becomes the act or event of giving, being in the world becomes a reception of the gift of Being.

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of a being with the ground of its being or beings as a whole, the ontological ends up consuming the ontic, thereby reinscribing Hegel's systematic appropriation of everything finite. The Heideggerian ontological difference secures neither divine transcendence nor human finitude, although it is intended to accomplish just that. Because of this failure, to which it remains blind, Heidegger's "ontological difference" between Being and being is, in Marion's estimation, the "ultimate idol."[16]

Despite this criticism, Marion *does* remain faithful to the Heideggerian project of overcoming metaphysics. He merely expands the category of metaphysics to include ontological difference, which has become the conceptual boundary beyond which thought must now progress. At the limits of the metaphysical, however, thought itself becomes the problem; extra-metaphysical thought could very well be impossible. This is precisely why Marion seeks to escape metaphysics. Only the unthinkable, he maintains, can force theo*logy* out of self-referential idolatry and into *theo*logy. Freeing "God" from metaphysics thus entails freeing Him from the overly-thought category of Being, and allowing His emergence as the iconic[17] God. As icon, God does not merely reflect human intentionality (as the ontotheological "God" does); rather, it holds and constitutes one in its own intention, which is love. Love, for Marion, remains sufficiently unthought to name God in his unthinkability. "Love does not pretend to *comprehend*,"[18] meaning it attempts neither to exhaust nor to understand God. God loves, but does not have to be. God loves, and one is by virtue of love. Love, then, delivers Being to beings; it is prior to the ontological difference, and to ontology. God is the God of *agape* beyond Being — of pure and excessive giving.

According to this logic, Being becomes something purely given: one *is* only to the extent that one receives the gift of Being. Being in the world is a continual acceptance of the divine outpouring — the receipt of God's gift of himself. Here lies the possibility of anti-ontological thought, at least for Marion: "God can give himself to be thought without idolatry only starting from himself alone: to give himself to be thought as love, hence as gift; to give himself to be thought as a thought of the gift. Or better, as a gift for thought, as a gift that gives itself to be thought. But a gift, which gives itself forever, can be thought only by a thought that gives itself to the gift to be thought. Only a thought that gives itself can devote itself to a gift

16. Marion, *God Without Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

17. The distinction between idol and icon lies in the origin of the gaze; the idol begins with and reflects back human desire, while the icon offers the possibility of the reverse.

18. Marion, *God Without Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

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for thought. But, for thought, what is it to give itself, if not to love?"[19] Thought's self-abandonment at the limits of the unthinkable seems to constitute a counter-gift to the primary and continual *agapic* overflow. Thought gives itself *up* to the divine unthinkability that first gives itself to (be) thought. Is giving prior to Being? Does Being give Being to beings, or does the giving give Being to beings? Is the being of beings a sufficient giving-back to the source of Being? Can *anything* be given back to the source of Being? Can anything be given back? Can anything be given?

The Problem of Gift-Giving

Lurking in the background of any contemporary meditation on the theological, sociological, and/or ontological implications of gift-giving lies a radical suspicion of its very possibility. This suspicion takes root in the work of Marcel Mauss, whose anthropological analyses of gift-exchange indicates that all European societies (in addition to "backward" ones) have been founded on an antagonistic and violent "system of total presentations," which gave way to a sublimated system of gift-exchange, before becoming systems based on individual contracts.[20] According to Mauss, gifts and counter-gifts produce social relations; individuals are bound by an ever-circulating obligation to give, to receive, and to repay "with interest."[21] This has been Mauss' most lasting insight: that the gift *binds* the recipient to the giver.[22] The recipient is *bound* to give back. "In theory," Mauss writes, "such gifts are voluntary but in fact they are given and repaid under obligation."[23] Giving is always also an anticipated taking; in fact, Emile Benveniste has demonstrated the connection between the Indo-European root *do-*, which gives rise to forms of the verb "to give," and the Hittite *da-*, meaning "to take."[24] Every act of giving is, eventually, an act of receiving, and this economy creates and sustains communal existence.

This "unceasing circling"[25] of mandated exchange may drive social

19. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

20. See Marcel Mauss, "Gift, Gift," in Schrift, *The Logic of the Gift*, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-32; and *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1967), Ch. I.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

22. "The object received as a gift, the received object in general, engages, links magically, religiously, morally, juridically, the giver and the receiver." Mauss, "Gift, Gift," *op. cit.*, p. 29.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

24. See Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, tr. by Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971).

25. Mauss, "Gift, Gift," *op. cit.*, p. 29.

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interactions, but Derrida has argued that it is not gift-giving. According to him, if a gift ensnares its recipient in a cycle of indebtedness, then it is more a poison than a present; "if you give because you must give, then you no longer give."[26] This seems fair, particularly in light of Mauss' conclusion that "to give is to show one's superiority, to show that one is something more and higher, that one is *magister*. To accept without returning or repaying more is to face subordination, to become a client and subservient, to become *minister*."[27] While enforced, aggressive giving cannot be true giving, Derrida ends up foreclosing the possibility of any reciprocity in order to salvage the free, "pure" gift from economic (and, of course, Hegelian) circularity. For Derrida, the only way out of the cycle of debt, repayment, and necessity is an entirely selfless, anonymous, and unilateral gift. The Derridean gift may be neither reciprocated nor acknowledged by either party, since recognizing a gift as a gift traps it within the sinister and self-identical economy of exchange, thus nullifying its gift-ness.[28] While it undoubtedly would disrupt circular identity, this "pure" gift is all but an impossibility. Derrida himself recognizes (and embraces) this difficulty; his response seems to be that one can never be certain of the gift's possibility or impossibility, much as one can never be sure if one acts ethically or not. The gift always needs to remain a "perhaps," since the mere assurance that one has given is a sort of restitution. The best one can do is to create a chance situation, like the main character of Baudelaire's "Counterfeit Money," who gives a beggar a false coin that will either make him rich or send him to jail.[29] Perhaps the giver has given; perhaps he has not. This "perhaps" is the extent of the possibility of the gift. More troubling than the sheer uncertainty surrounding the Derridean gift, however, is its powerlessness to create or maintain relations between giver and recipient. Derrida is attempting to move as far as possible from Mauss' rivalrous economy of expected returns, but in so doing he runs too far in the opposite direction, leaving gift-giving a carnivalesque display of discrete — preferably dead — bodies: courting forgetfulness, effacing their own traces and intentions for the sake of a lifeless, haphazard, and duplicitous gift.

Is it necessary to abolish relationality in order to disrupt consciousness'

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26. Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, tr. by Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 156.
27. Mauss, *The Gift*, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
28. Cf. Derrida, *Given Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
29. *Ibid.*, Chs. 3 and 4.

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return to itself? Can there be no exchange without circular necessity? Within an explicitly theological context, these questions are inextricably tied to a consideration of the Heideggerian critique of metaphysics. First, does thinking God as *giving*, rather than *being*, and as Being (and therefore, thinking the Being of beings as a gift, rather than a given) resist the critique of ontotheology? Can it escape a Hegelian economy of return by preserving transcendence and finitude as irreducible to one another? If so, how might such ontological givenness illuminate reciprocity? A theology of the gift requires that one privilege relationality over epistemology, which in turn opens the possibility of non-appropriative, unduplicitous exchange across both ontological and ontic difference. Relationality is not the outcome (as Mauss would have it), but the *precondition* of gift-giving, and it is this radical priority of relationality that permits relationality.

Relationality over Epistemology: A Reformulation of the Critique of Ontotheology

Milbank argues that any attempt to escape metaphysics reinstates the most facile form of metaphysics,[30] primarily because there is no extra-metaphysical space to which (un-)thought might escape. The impulse to overcome metaphysics, he maintains, derives from a misconception of the metaphysical. In Heidegger's concept of "ecstatic time," the past and future determine a fixed present,[31] a system that forecloses transcendence and dooms metaphysics to circle aimlessly within immanence. Similarly, Marion's project of surpassing Being is the result of a limited understanding of Being as corresponding solely to knowledge, rather than as encompassing truth, beauty, and goodness, as is for Aquinas. In other words, metaphysics can only be equated with a facile onto-theo-logic when it is ruled by an immanentist supremacy of human understanding. One only needs to overcome Being if Being remains a flat, epistemological category. Thus, his critique of Marion's replacing "Being" with "love": "Love . . . only exceeds the ontological if Being has already been strictly correlated with knowledge — a

30. Heidegger would have agreed: "Every metaphysics of metaphysics, and every logic of philosophy, that in any way whatever attempts to climb beyond metaphysics falls back most surely beneath metaphysics, without knowing where, precisely in so doing, it has fallen." Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead'," in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, tr. by William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 109. Heidegger attributes this failure to a historical immaturity, i.e., one is not yet ready to think the truth of Being as Being.

31. Milbank contrasts this with the Augustinian scheme of which it is "parodic": past and present, corresponding with the Father and the Son, create a non-determined future.

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shift perhaps begun with Aristotle, but only 'completed' by Descartes."[32]

Heidegger explicitly defines ontotheology as thought that makes God another being among beings. Marion expands this, dubbing "ontotheological" any thought that confines God to thought by subsuming Him under the category of Being. Milbank's insights might help to formulate a further revision of the ontotheological: a refinement of the Heideggerian critique, which is by no means at odds with it (and certainly not independent of it). The ontotheological "God" is, as Feuerbach knew, merely a model of the beings that project it. By extension, any "God" identified as "Being," when Being is merely an epistemological term, is just a super-human figure crafted by and reflecting back a Faustian human desire. This will-toward-knowledge finds its consummation in Hegel's envisioned "religion," i.e., an entirely speculative system within which relation to God is absolute knowledge of God, which becomes possible by virtue of the speculative identity between infinite and finite, concept and reality, knower and known. Yet, what kind of "God" is so known? The lack of distinction between the finite and infinite places the Hegelian "God" at the height of idolatry; with no distance to cross, human intentionality re-projects itself as the extent of the real, endlessly returning itself to its immanent self.

There is no ontological *difference* between the God of an absolutized epistemology and those who endeavor to know him. In this manner, speculative identity actually *prevents* relation, replacing it with a stark "knowledge." The primacy of epistemology and the denial of difference are therefore co-implied, and they *both* lead straight into idolatry. The Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian impulse, of course, is to rehabilitate difference in order to elude the ontotheological. Yet, an unmitigated *différance* can prevent relationality just as thoroughly as a forced identity; foreclosing, as it does, all possibility of presence, *différance* fetishizes presence as thoroughly (albeit negatively) as Enlightenment does metaphysics.[33] In other words, the God of infinite Derridean postponement is just as ontotheological as the God of absolute knowledge. (Their being equally ontotheological does *not* amount to their being identical.) The subject cannot praise, thank, or define itself in relation to either of these "Gods"; it can merely obsess over its (in)ability to understand them.

A theology of the gift can provide an escape from ontotheology only

32. John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysics," in *Modern Theology*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (January 1995), p. 141.

33. See Catherine Pickstock, "Thomas Aquinas and the Quest for the Eucharist," in *Modern Theology*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (April, 1999), pp. 159-180.

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if it privileges relationality over epistemology. And relationality within a theology of the gift is intelligible only if there can be a *giving-back*, an event which will have to navigate between the equally treacherous shores of Maussian necessity and Derridean impossibility. In this vein, Milbank argues for a "purified gift exchange" in the place of the misleadingly ascetic "pure gift." He criticizes Marion's scheme as persistently unidirectional; distance may preserve the possibility of a unilateral gift, but a unilateral gift is ultimately not a gift at all: "to be given *only* what is held at a distance is to be given . . . nothing."[34] For Milbank, it is not distance, but intersubjectivity that renders possible any kind of gift-giving. Within Christian theology, intersubjectivity is actually prior to the ontological distinction, so that the exchange between and among the persons of the Trinity is the precondition for all other relationality.

This radically-prior relationality is reducible neither to simple identity nor to unmediated difference. On the contrary, relation can only function as identity across difference, and difference in the midst of identity. In this rehabilitated, non-appropriative dynamic of relation, distance and exchange both enable and preserve one another. This constant oscillation is functionally analogous to the interplay between the ontological distinction and analogy in Aquinas: the qualitative *difference* between God and mankind allows the *connection*, and the connection necessitates and maintains difference as irreducible. This dynamic of unity and difference sustains relationality, which alone can provide an escape from ontotheology.

Divine-Human Exchange

According to Heidegger, the "God" of Hegelian epistemology is merely another object of knowledge. Since there is ultimately no difference between mankind and the God of speculation, there can be no relation between them: "man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god . . . man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god."[35] At the other end of the spectrum, but quite similarly, the infinitely withdrawn God of radical alterity is also one to whom nothing can be given. For Derrida, a mortal "can only give to what is mortal since he can give everything except immortality, everything except salvation as immortality."[36]

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34. Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given?" *op. cit.*, p. 133.
35. Heidegger in Marion, *God Without Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
36. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, tr. by David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 43. Of course, it remains to be seen why one *would* give immortality to God, even if one *could*.

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Relation is just as impossible within an economy of unmediated difference as it is within an economy of self-sameness. Only if relationality is always-already in operation, as exemplified in the primacy of Trinitarian interplay, are difference and unity both preserved in and through one another, so that a divine-human relation might be possible. In other words, the intersubjectivity of the Trinity, God as *always-already relational*, is the precondition for exchange across ontological difference.

If the creative gesture is an excessive giving *of* the divine *esse*, then all of creation is, at its very foundation, a gift. Humanity's being-as-gift means that being-in-the-world is a reception of that gift, and reception is already a kind of reciprocity.[37] Divine-human reciprocity, however, resists self-identical circularity by virtue of the ontological difference between God and mankind; one's irreducible finitude always renders one's response to the divine call tardy and imperfect. Viewed this way, divine-human exchange is never fully reciprocal, insofar as it is always characterized by Milbank's requisite "delay and non-identical repetition" (dare one call this a de-secularized *différance*?), which allows exchange without necessity, and difference without haphazardness.

As both Marion and Milbank have argued, one cannot give anything *back* to God that is extra to God. In that case, anything one gives to God must be something that one has of God. And insofar as being-in-the-world is a continual reception of — and participation in — the gift of Being, that which one has of God is the self that so receives and participates. Divine *esse* overflows in creative *ecstasis*, returning non-identically to itself through the beings thus constituted. Viewed in this way, one cannot help but give back to God. Such reception is the most basic form of return, but it is still a return, so that one's very being is constituted through one's participation in Being-as-gift. A refusal to accept the divine gift would thus plunge the self into ontic nothingness; as Milbank explains, one cannot refuse God's gift *as oneself*, since one's self only *is* by virtue of its receiving this gift. But one *can* choose not to acknowledge the divine gift or (and one might accuse Derrida of this) not to see the possibility or purpose of exchange. Such a denial would freeze the self in a state of ontological suspension, akin to Marion's "vanity." Vanity occupies the liminal space between idolatry and charity; it sees the world as irreducibly distant from the anonymous gaze that regards it, but does not yet see the world as "loved — by God,"[38] and gives way to melancholy.

37. See Derrida, *Given Time*, *op. cit.*, Ch. 2.
38. Marion, *God Without Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

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One could say that vanity sees difference, but fails to see exchange.

Yet, it is not enough, at least in terms of the God-relation, merely to exist. To be sure, existence alone is a reciprocation, but a minimal one; moreover, it is a *misguided* reciprocation, inasmuch as existence cannot possibly *be* alone. Seeing the world as loved by God means receiving the gift *as* love, returning it in non-identical *mimesis* of the primary gesture of love, and awaiting its transformed restoration. The self that sees the world as loved sees itself as a gift, and gives itself back to the giver who first — and continually — gives itself to be received; the self's ability to love God is its ability to give itself *back* (or *up*), imperfectly and always late, to God. In this non-antagonistic economy, the thing sacrificed is the "pure" knowledge that would attempt to assimilate the divine to itself: "Only a thought that gives itself can devote itself to a gift for thought."[39] If the ontotheological "God" is one created and confined by human thought and desire, then liberating God from ontotheology would mean giving thought and desire back/up to God, a move made possible only by virtue of divine-human reciprocity.

An Ethic of Exchange

According to Milbank: "The ontological question is only seriously posed and answered in practice."[40] Exchange across ontological difference lies, on a vertical plane, between the Trinitarian intersubjectivity that enables it, and the ontic intersubjectivity that secures it. Of course, God's giving is not contingent upon one's giving across ontic difference, but one's giving-back to God (at least, over and above mere existence) absolutely *is* dependent upon giving to others. Giving on the ontic plane, however, as is evident in both Mauss and Derrida, is a complicated issue. If, through a primacy of relationality, exchange is indeed possible, it must avoid both the rivalrous, violent spirit of the *potlatch* and the infinitely-deferred "purity" of the "disinterested" gift. If, furthermore, the act of giving between created beings must be a non-identical mimesis of the gift that initially gives them to give, then giving must retain the elements of distance and commerce that the Trinity and the ontological distinction both preserve. Giving on the ontic plane must be a participation in the giving that precedes it, i.e., a different and deferred exchange across a non-collapsed distance.

Thanks to the primary gift *of* an originary intersubjectivity, one's self is what one has been given to give. Both to and from one, *one's self is*

39. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

40. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1990), p. 217.

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given. Given that one's self must give the gift of oneself, the question of exchange between and among given beings becomes a question of sacrifice: "The only gift is a portion of thyself."[41] The problem remains: *How does one make a gift of oneself?*

Milbank has shown this to be the failure of the "post-modern sacrificial ethic": its impossibility *on earth*; if, as Derrida and Marion argue, gift-giving must be unilateral, then the supremely ethical gesture is death for another,[42] since only *self*-obliteration fully prevents the gift's obliteration in economic exchange.[43] If, however, the consummate ethical gift is a "gift of death," then one can never be ethical(ly). Thus, Milbank's critique of the Derridean self-sacrificial ethics focuses on Derrida's denial of commerce between and among (living) subjects: in effect, his rejection of community. What is more disturbing — perhaps only because it is more surprising — is Derrida's denial of difference in his discussion of the gift.

Following Jan Patocka, Derrida argues that the *mysterium tremendum* of Christianity gives the self its *own* death, securing subjective singularity in relation to Absolute Singularity, and issuing in responsibility. Responsibility can only respond to the particular, and as such, Derrida continues (in a move borrowed from *Fear and Trembling*), duty to the Absolute must violate duty to the universal. In a sudden and radical departure from Kierkegaard, however, he then absolutizes "absolute duty," calling the Abrahamic sacrifice "the most common and everyday experience of responsibility."[44] Every duty is absolute duty, and every choice is a sacrifice: "How would you ever justify the fact that you sacrifice all the cats in the world to the cat that you feed at home every morning for years, whereas other cats die of hunger at every instant?"[45] The singularity heralded by the *mysterium tremendum* means that "responsibility" violates the universally ethical at every turn, so that everyone is Abraham, killing one's only son at each hour of the day, in the name of a million alterities, all of which are one. "If God is completely other," he argues, "the figure or

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41. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Gifts," in *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. by Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge Press, 1997), p. 26.

42. See Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, *op. cit.*: the irreducibility of human finitude means that one can *die* for, but never die *for* another.

43. See Milbank, "The Midwinter Sacrifice: A Sequel to 'Can Morality Be Christian?'" in *Studies in Christian Ethics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-38. In fact, Milbank goes on to say, the highest ethics according to this logic must be atheistic, in which the unilateral gift is preserved as such, because the giving subject cannot hope for an eschatological return.

44. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

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name of the wholly other, then every other (one) is every (bit) other [*tout autre est tout autre*]. . . . What can be said about Abraham's relation to God can be said about one's relation without relation to [*tout autre comme tout autre*], in particular my relation to my neighbor or to my loved ones who are as inaccessible to me, as secret and transcendent as Jahweh."[46]

It is astounding that a thinker so concerned with difference could efface it so completely. If every other is just as other as every other other, then God is different from Fred in the same way that Fred is different from his cat in the same way that the cat's ball of yarn is different from God. And if all otherness is identical to all other otherness, then every otherness is the same, the singular is no longer singular, the finite no longer finite, and all difference is identity. Without different kinds of difference, there *is* no difference. It is therefore no surprise that Derrida's relation must be a "relation without relation." It is also no surprise that he cannot envision a non-sinister exchange, that his gift and his God must be forever deferred, when neither communication *nor* difference manages to survive his "ethical" inquiry.

If bilateral, non-identical exchange can take place between subjects, it must do so by virtue of a radically-prior relationality. Both Mauss' appropriative gift and Derrida's unilateral never-never-gift are ultimately impossible, because they assume subjectivity to be pre-relational, and relation to be something added to discrete selves. Between subjects suffering such delusions of self-constitution, a gift-giving that eludes the equally-treacherous poles of rivalry and suicide is absolutely impossible. Only if ontology is understood as always-already relational can the self give without subsuming the other or destroying itself. Only within a non-oppositional scheme of selfhood and otherness (and a non-identical scheme of otherness and Otherness) does the self find itself in the interplay of giving, given selves, constituted and maintained through their participation in divine intersubjectivity, a constant play of unity and difference.

The question remains: *How can one make a gift of oneself?* Any ethic grounded in a theology of the gift cannot be the false asceticism of "self-sacrificial" ethics. However, an ethic of gift-exchange must entail a sort of sacrifice: insofar as one is given, one's self is what one has to give. A sacrifice is a gift *of* oneself. This is what distinguishes Abraham from Derrida: raising the knife over one's only son is a sacrifice. Feeding one's cat instead of all other cats is *not*. It is a decision, and perhaps even an act of neglect to feed only one cat, but it is not a *sacrifice*, because the cats given up have nothing to do with the self that gives. Even if self-sacrificial

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

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ethics — in its most hyperbolic form — were valid, and one *could* make a gift of death, one *still* could not make a gift of anonymous cats.

"The only gift is a gift of thyself." Yet, the self that gives itself by eliminating itself does not give at all, insofar as selfhood as such is constituted relationally. The self must give itself, but to give itself, the self must keep itself. In keeping with the primary gift that enables ethical exchange through a priority of relationality, the sacrificial gesture of ontic exchange must not only be non-identical and non-simultaneous, but *non-exhaustive*. The excessive divine outpouring that gives does not empty out the divine. In *mimesis* of the divine giving that gives the self to itself, the self that gives across ontic or ontological difference must survive the giving in order to enable exchange. In fact, in this re-ontologized ethic of exchange, the gesture of sacrifice actually *strengthens* the giving/receiving subject through its participation in the divine giving that gives Being to beings.

In a recent anthropological analysis of gift-giving, Maurice Godelier argues that, even within economies based on exchange, not everything is circulated. "Systems of total presentations," in fact, rely on those elements that Mauss and his commentators have neglected: the *non*-presented. All societies, Godelier contends, are held in the balance of two types of objects: alienable and inalienable. The former are circulating, exchangeable, *commercial*, and, following Mauss, they have been the focus of most expositions of gift-giving. Their exchange, however, is dependent on the fixity of *inalienable* objects, which are always a society's most *sacred* objects. Sacred objects are classified as such by virtue of their being gifts from the gods, holding some of the divine power within them and connecting their owners to their sacred origins. For these reasons, and because sacred objects ultimately belong to the gods, they cannot be given away; an individual or clan is required to *keep* its sacred objects. This possessor, however, is just as strongly obligated to share the *effects* of the object's divine power; circulating among all the members of a community, these effects create relations, sustain the society, and connect it to its origins. Insofar as there is a difference between sacred objects, as well as an irreducible difference between the gods and mankind, these circulated "benefits" "can never be truly reciprocal. . . . In a hierarchically ordered political-religious universe, there can be no true symmetry."[47] Could ontic asymmetry secure an ethic of exchange?

The double imperative arising from a theology of the gift, i.e., to keep

47. Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, tr. by Nora Scott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 121-122.

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oneself *and* give oneself, is nonsensical if selves are to be construed as commercial objects. Moreover, a commercialized construal of selfhood necessarily locks exchange into calculated economy. What if selfhood were read, however, as "sacred," rather than "commercial"? If being is a gift of the gods, connecting one to the sacred realm and ultimately reclaimable, then, following Godelier's logic, it is one's duty *not* to give one's self away. But one is equally charged with giving the "effects of the power" of one's ontology, whose circulation maintains and strengthens relations between and among giving, given beings, sustaining them in a non-economic economy of non-exhaustive reciprocity. One gives and is given by virtue of a God who is giving Being. But does "God is giving Being" mean that God *is* Being that gives? Or is Being merely *that which* God gives?

Any of the names of God — Father, Being, even Love — has the potential to seem totalizing, trapping God within an irreducibly human ontotheology. Aquinas knew this, and though many cite his article on the divine names, in which he argues that *esse* most properly describes God, they seem to overlook the few paragraphs that follow. Aquinas does indeed say that "He Who Is," insofar as it expresses most accurately God's essence as his existence, insofar as it is unrestricted and universal, and insofar as it is eternally in the present tense, is the most appropriate name for God. At the end, however, he writes that when one considers what the word is used to mean, it must be admitted "that 'God' is more appropriate [than "He Who Is"], for this is used to signify the divine nature. Even more appropriate is the Tetragrammaton, which is used to signify the incommunicable and, if one could say such a thing, individual substance of God."[48] "God" is even more proper than Being, because it signifies God's God-ness, and YHWH is the most proper name of all, because it signals the *limits of linguistic and cognitive capacity* with respect to the God-ness of God. One's relation to God both precedes and exceeds one's "knowledge" of God. Better, what one knows of God is that one *is* in and through God. Ultimately, the only epistemology is ontological relationality; the only way to know God is to proclaim him God. Is "Being" a proper name for God? Yes, as long as one understands Being/beings/being as entirely relational, rather than as confined to a logic of selfhood versus otherness. The priority of intersubjectivity thus enables exchange, preventing theology from idolatry and ethics from self-destruction. What is relationality, then, if not the gift? To be sure, the relationality that allows the gift to be given is itself the gift given: a gift so excessive that it very well might be unthinkable.

48. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (London: Blackfriars, 1975), III, 13, 11.

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Richard Wagner and the Trajectory of German Transcendental Philosophy

Michael Mack

In his theoretical works, Wagner constructs an opposition between the idealism and Germanness, and realism, which he equates with Jewishness. Some elements of this opposition can be found also in Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, Ludwig Feuerbach and Arthur Schopenhauer. Despite continuities, there are also discontinuities between Wagner's, Kant's and Hegel's perception of Jews. Even though Kant and Hegel provided a rather prejudicial account of Jewishness (in which Jews embody materialism and therefore heteronomy), they do not perceive Jews as a threat. Wagner saw Jews as a threat. Nevertheless, he easily found support for his paranoid fear in Kant's, Hegel's, Feuerbach's, and Schopenhauer's opposition between the non-Jewish ideal of autonomy and the "Jewish" reality of heteronomy, which permeates the German anti-Semitic contrast between German idealism and Jewish realism from Wagner to Heinrich Treitschke to Houston Stewart Chamberlain.[1]

In "The Ring of the Nibelungen," Wagner literally puts on stage a Kantian autonomy-heteronomy divide. In symbolizing heteronomy, i.e., value that helps one gain possession of various use-values, "The Ring" functions as a character-defining device in relation to which the protagonists of the cycle establish their respective personalities. Accordingly, the actual ring denotes heteronomy, i.e., an orientation to the enjoyment and power yielded by material objects, whereas Kant's ideal of autonomy consists in freedom from any external determinations. Wagner's revisions of

1. This opposition shaped German anti-Semitism in the19th and 20th centuries. Cf. Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins. The German Academic Community, 1890-1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

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key concepts developed by Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Schopenhauer[2] contributes to an understanding of how simplified and rather eclectic versions of Kantian moral philosophy entered German "national culture."[3]

In the 18th and 19th centuries, German philosophy attempted to reconcile Christian dogma with secular reason. Pseudo-biological notions of race and pseudo-theological versions of anti-Semitism were mutually sustaining and reinforcing in this project. Both "Jewishness" and Judaism came to be associated with the material and the corporeal in order to exclude Jews from an idealist type of body politic. Thus, Jews were blamed for what was actually the product of an internal paradox: they became scapegoats for the contradictions of an Enlightenment philosophy that claimed to be universal, while simultaneously belying its embeddedness in a particular cultural constellation: Christian Europe. The universalist discourse within these German writings exposes its own historical particularity precisely when it stigmatizes Jews as the particular, i.e., as the empirical body resisting translation into the body politic.

Thus, Kant characterizes Jews as "Palestinians who live amongst us,"[4] thereby exposing their exclusion from his "universal" and "non-dogmatic" philosophy. In so doing, he stigmatizes Jews as "Orientals," who are literally living next door. But why does Kant Orientalize European Jews? Like many other philosophical systems, the Kantian autonomy-heteronomy divide constitutes a purely formal aspect of his architectonic. Yet, Kant also exemplifies this universal formality with reference to a particular historical-religious context. He develops a static and essentialist notion of Jews as heteronomous in direct opposition to the "rational," secularized Christian idea of autonomy. By deploying the autonomy-heteronomy divide, Kant targets Jews as an obstacle to the establishment of a

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2. While there has been little discussion of Wagner's attempted popularization of Kant's, Hegel's, Feuerbach's, and Schopenhauer's moral philosophy, this does not mean that his debt to German Enlightenment thought has been overlooked. Paul Lawrence Rose, *Revolutionary Anti-Semitism in Germany from Kant to Wagner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), claims that German revolutionary thought differed from its French and British versions, and that Wagner followed this tradition in his anti-Semitic works. Rose, however, does not address the implications of this difference.

3. For Wagner's impact of on middle class professionals at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, see Anette Hein *"Es ist viel Hitler in Wagner." Antisemitismus und Deutschtumsideologie in den Bayreuther Blättern* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997); and Saul Friendländer, "Hitler and Wagner," in Siegfried Friedländer and Jörn Rüsen, eds., *Richard Wagner im Dritten Reich* (Munich: Beck Verlag, 2000), pp. 165-178.

4. Kant, *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie und Pädogogik*, Vol. II., ed. by Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt a/M: Insel Verlag, 1964), p. 517.

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rational order in which heteronomy would be overcome.

Why did Kant, as well as Hegel, Feuerbach, Schopenhauer, and Wagner focus on the Jews as the empirical impediment that prevents the construction of an idealist type of body politic? In the historical context of 18th and 19th centuries Germany, Jews represent the Orientals who live in the West, but do not "essentially" belong there. Seen in this light — as the uncanny within the homely — the Jews are easy targets for the internal contradictions within a secularized and politicized version of Christian moral thought, i.e., they bear the brand of the tension between the ideal (autonomy with Kant, dialectics with Hegel, the total work of art with Wagner) and the real (heteronomy, the non-dialectical, socio-political life that has not become part of "total art").

Wagner's obsessive contrast between idealism and realism, as well as his blaming Jews for precluding a realization of the ideal, partly develops out of his study of German transcendental philosophy. Radicalizing Schopenhauer's revision of Kant's rational theology, Wagner tries to reconcile art with the "essence of Christianity." Thus, his "aesthetic sensibility" involves an attempt to replace the transcendental concept of the rational. Ultimately, both concepts attempt to transform the "essence of Christianity" into a contemporary intellectual matrix: they focus on the transformation of the individual body into an autonomous and all-embracing entity. To this extent, both share a concern with the translation of the body into the body politic. This, however, does not alter the fact that Wagner also reinvests a German transcendental paradigm with an aestheticism that claims to make contingent materiality into a spiritual unity akin to the attempts of Kant and some of his followers to make reason the touchstone of a civil society defined by secularized Christian-Lutheran values.

Immutability in Religion

In an idiosyncratic way, Kant and some of his followers define "freedom" in terms of liberation from one's inclinations to objects in the empirical world.[5] In fact, Kant's distinctive transcendental revolution consists precisely in establishing a radical divide between "the world of

5. Neither Kant nor any of his followers disregard the materiality of natural existence. On the contrary, they take it very seriously, for it is something whose overcoming preconditions the establishment of a transcendental body politic. On the devaluation of empirical reality and of causality, see Ernst Topitsch, *Die Voraussetzungen der Transzendentalphilosophie. Kant in weltanschauungsanalytischer Betrachtung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, 1975), p. 44.

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nature and the world of freedom,"[6] which shapes this notion of freedom in Enlightenment thought. Essentially, it is this divide between the body (nature) and the body politic (freedom) that has political implications. To this extent, nature can be overcome only by an identification of bare life with politics. What describes the workings of this idealist body politic is that it subjects a totality of bodies within a specific group to its symbolic order. The rules of this order are valid, but not meaningful. Instead, they are significant only insofar as they are able to change the very nature of the empirically constituted body. Thus, the laws of the body politic are those of "being in force without significance."[7]

The law of reason coincides with the reason of the law that is in force without significance. Kantian rationality, with its unbridgeable gulf between freedom and nature, sets out to demonstrate the worthlessness of bare life. Reason dominates and overcomes nature by humiliating desires for material objects. Kant's law of autonomy helps to enact such a subjugation of the body to the forces of the body politic. Although Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Feuerbach sought to differentiate their work from Kant's, they continued to maintain and sometimes to interpret Kant's divide between nature and freedom. In various theoretical accounts, they all blame the Jews (a metaphor that is multivalent in its application)[8] for the impossibility of closing this gap in a "universal" manner.

Kant's Autonomy-Heteronomy Divide

Kant's peculiar attempt to make a scientific explanation of the world compatible with its overcoming sets the stage for much of the tension characteristic of 19th century German thought.[9] According to Yirmiyahu Yovel, "the German *Aufklärung* differed from the French *Lumières* in that it did not oppose religious truth but tried to make it as rational as possible."

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6. Donald N. Levine, *Visions of the Sociological Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 181.

7. Agamben has pinpointed in Kant the theoretical foundations of this modern law, whose signification paradoxically consists in being non-significant: "In Kant the pure form of law as 'being in force without significance' appears for the first time in modernity. What Kant calls 'the simple form of law' in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is in fact a law reduced to the zero point of significance, which is, nevertheless, in force as such." See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, tr. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 51.

8. For a discussion of the ambiguity of the German term *Judentum*, see Rose, *Revolutionary Antisemitism*, *op. cit.*, p. XVII.

9. On the Kantian tension between the explanation of the world and its overcoming, see Topitsch's *Die Voraussetzungen der Transzendentalphilosophie*, *op. cit.*, p. 64

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In contrast to the French deists, who "attacked religion in the name of reason, German Enlightenment thinkers tended to *reconcile* reason with revelation, mainly by having reason prove itself, on its own authority, the existence of God, free will, the immortality of the soul, and a moral order governing the world."[10] But how does Kant attempt to reconcile "the essence of Christianity" with the rational? In his notion of autonomy, he attempts to harmonize secular reason with one element of Christian doctrine that prescribes the Christ-like dying away from the mundane world.

As early as *Groundworks of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant defines ethics as being "completely purged of anything empirical."[11] He attributes unquestionable authority to laws, and insists that these must not be "reasoned against,"[12] precisely because they have no relation either to the empirical, and thus to the contingent, or to the corporeal, and thus to the imperfect. Rather, they have an *a priori* foundation in the autonomy of pure reason: "a law, if it should be valid as morality, i.e. as ground for compulsion, must command absolute necessity . . . the ground of compulsion must not be sought in the nature of humanity, or in the conditions of the world, in which it is placed, but in an *a priori* manner in terms of pure reason."[13] Thus, Kant establishes an opposition between law and inclination,[14] and the Kantian ideal of autonomy has a bearing on this opposition between "duty" and "inclination." He defines autonomy as abstract movement away from the mundane world, in radical polarity to heteronomy as the movement toward empirical objects. Receptivity to the particularity of different material entities constitutes the law of heteronomy.

Kant targets the Jews as the embodiment of heteronomy. Accordingly, Jews are not only the opposite of secularized Christianity, which is defined in terms of autonomous reason, but Jewishness embodies the stranger in a Kantian civil society, whose very laws presuppose an autonomous state of indetermination by objects of empirical reality. Kant reverses Paul's spirit-letter opposition so as to define Christianity as a revolution, a concept that breaks radically with Judaism.[15] This reversal

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10. Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Dark Riddle. Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Jews* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p. 10.
11. See Kant, *Schriften zur Ethik und Religionsphilosophie 1*, ed. by Wilhelm Weischdel (Frankfurt a/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1956), p. 12
12. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
15. See Michael Mack, "Law, Charity and Taboo or Kant's Reversal of Paul's Spirit-Letter Opposition," in *Modern Theology* 16 (October 2000), pp. 417-441.

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has major implications for Kant's view of both the corporeal and the Jews (Kant often conflates the two). He formulates his spirit-letter opposition in terms of a fundamental divide between the "physical" and the "moral."[16] He thereby rejects the spiritual validity of the body, and thus contradicts Paul's notion of the spirit as taking care of the body.[17]

In this reversal, the letter signifies the materially concrete, whereas the spirit denotes the freedom from the corporeal as autonomous reason. Significantly, Kant equates the letter with narrativity and concrete, empirical, and ever changing "actions," whereas the spirit denotes abstract and static "attitudes."[18] Thus, the Pauline spirit as what gives life turns into Paul's letter that kills. This is so, because Kant's spirit demands the complete separation from material life. In *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, he argues that the letter signifies any "motivating force" external to the unquestionable and static laws established by pure reason, be it "charity" or "compassion." The spirit, by contrast, denotes morality as following the laws for their own sake, free from any other motivating force.[19]

The political aspects of Kant's exclusion of Judaism from both Christianity and a "modern", i.e., a "rational," body politic comes to the fore in his *Anthropology*, where he calls the Jews "a nation of cheaters."[20] In doing so, he reconstructs a group of people who value their interests in empirical life more highly than approximating the conceptual truth laid down by civil society. Indeed, he links the body politic to religion, arguing that the inability to participate in a civil society, based on the "mine and yours" property and ownership distinction, is reducible to the Jews' "superstition."[21] Thus, Kant grounds the immutability of the Jews in their religion.

What exactly does Kant mean when he calls Jews "superstitious"? Specifically, he defines superstition in terms of reason's subjection to external facts,[22] i.e., to the principle of heteronomy. In Kant's view, superstition is irrational, since it does not restrict the usage of reason to reason's (autonomous) self-rule, but instead orients rational activity

16. Kant, *Schriften zur Ethik und Religionsphilosophie 1*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

17. Paul did not establish a radical opposition between law and charity, the spiritual and the empirical. See Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

18. Kant, *Schriften zur Ethik und Religionsphilosophie 1*, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

19. Kant, *Schriften zur Ethik und Religionsphilosophie 2, op. cit.*, p. 678.

20. Kant, *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie und Pädagogik*, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 517.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 518.

22. Kant, *Schriften zur Metaphysik und Logik*, ed. by W. Weischedel (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1958), p. 281.

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toward that "which it can justify by *objective grounds* and dogmatic conviction."[23] Thus, by calling the Jews superstitious, Kant defines rational autonomy as freedom from both the empirically and the religiously given, whereas he associates Jews with heteronomy, superstition, and irrationality. In this way, he excludes the Jews from his transcendental scheme. But he does not, as does Wagner, depict Jewishness as a demonic power. Nevertheless, in Kant's view, Jews do not respect property and monetary relations that proscribe against desire for material gain — as enacted by cheating. This may explain why the connection between the essentialist depiction of Jews as cheaters in his *Anthropology,* and his discussion of Jewish law in *Metaphysics of Morals* and in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* is not as slim as it might first appear.

In *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant posits "the goods of this world" as the motivating force behind the Jews' "mental disposition."[24] He depicts Jews as a collective that has not followed the path of transcendental freedom, but rather that of enslavement to the material world. According to Kant, cheating results from the Jewish religion. Thus, he implicitly secularizes the Christian ideal of overcoming the mundane, while enunciating a transcendental body politic in which the individual has to renounce the principle of heteronomy by forsaking any determining relation to the "goods of this world." This is made abundantly clear when Kant proclaims Christ to be a revolutionary hero who overthrows Judaism's priests and its ceremonial statues, thus introducing both a "moral attitude" and a "public revolution."[25] In this context, Christ's body on the cross stands in for the body that has been translated into the body politic. For Kant, Jesus' truth consists not in the particular and exemplary form of his life, but rather in the rejection, symbolized by the cross, of all worldly existence. The cross functions as an example only in the sense of a transcendental idea, since his death "opens the door to freedom to everyone, who, like Jesus, wants to die away from any orientation to earthly life, which impinges on the moral constitution of the body politic."[26]

Kant uses the "moral idea" of Christ's sacrifice as an explanation for the absolute authority of autonomous reason. Like Christ, everyone should "die away" from the happiness of sensuousness that interferes with

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23. Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, tr. and ed. by Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 17.
24. Kant, *Schriften zur Ethik und Religionsphilosophie* Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 735.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 737.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 738.

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the commandments of a completely detached rationality. Thus, Kant's notions of both reason and freedom modernize the old Christian Jew-hatred in philosophical-religious as well as in political-anthropological terms.[27] According to Kant's anti-Semitic fantasy, it is the Jews' religion that conditions them as the immutable other of a body politic based on transcendental indifference to empirical objects. It is this indifference that enables the acceptance of the "mine and yours" property distinction.

The "Immutable Tie" Between "Jehovah" and "his People"

What is revolutionary about a mine-yours property distinction? It is not the distinction as such, but rather the transcendental turn Kant gives it that prepares the ground for a "modernized" notion of the body politic, i.e. that an unequal distribution of wealth makes members of bourgeois civil society implicitly subscribe to autonomy, insofar as they respect the regulations that do not make the earth everyone's possession and, thereby, arbitrarily restrict access to "the goods of this world."[28] Kant's transcendental paradigm could likewise be used as the theoretical underpinning of a communitarian and socialist body politic, as in the work of Feuerbach and the young Hegelians, whom Wagner read in his revolutionary period, shortly before writing his infamous "Judaism in Music" (1850).

Kant's exclusion of the Jews from both rationality and the body politic set the stage for the expulsion of Judaism from an ostensibly universalist notion of reason and, simultaneously, at least metaphorically, ostracized them from participation in a rational body politic. Hegel's radicalization of Kant's idealism goes in tandem with the latter by articulating a prejudicial charge against the religion of the Jews that is, once again, perceived to be immutable. When Hegel accuses Israel of inhabiting a radical divide between the empirical and the spiritual — a divide that coincides with the one between body and body politic — he follows the trajectory of a Kantian opposition between autonomy and heteronomy. Although Hegel claims to have overcome the dichotomy between materiality and spirituality, the closing of this gap depends on a deepening of transcendental

27. Rose has drawn attention to the revolutionary, rather than biological aspect of modern anti-Semitism: "What modernized the old Jew-hatred was not the application of biological theories, but the advent of the new vision of revolution and redemption." See Rose, *Revolutionary Anti-Semitism*, *op. cit.*, p. 15. The only analysis he gives of the revolutionary content of Kant's thought and those who took over his transcendental paradigm is to point out its difference from French and British liberalism.

28. See Michael Mack, "Between Kant and Kafka: Walter Benjamin's Notion of Law," in *Neophilologus* 85 (April 2001), pp. 257-272.

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tendencies to the point where, by way of dialectics, the empirical becomes the spiritual. The real is the rational, and those who perceive being as materiality live in a world of illusion. For Hegel, this conflation of the transcendental and the empirical describes the working of dialectics, thus illustrating the coincidence between being and non-being.[29] He targets Jews as a social group that lives in this illusory world, located outside of dialectics. Heteronomy, i.e., Kant's orientation to the "goods of this world," turns into a dependence on the illusion of mere being.

According to Hegel, the Jews are heteronomously bound to material life as a result of an allegedly immutable attachment to their God, who truly possesses the earth. More importantly, however, he asks his people to forego any transformative relation to his creation, on which they are allowed to live only as tenants, not as landlords. As a consequence of their religious imagination, Hegel's Jews value life as spiritual matter and, for this reason, refrain from eating blood (blood being a substance that supports most forms of empirical existence). Hegel emphasizes the role of "blood that must not be devoured because, according to the Jewish imagination, it incorporates the life of animals," and stresses that "man must not devour or destroy the soul (of life), but has to respect it."[30]

Interpreting Jewish dietary laws as helping to set limits to the violence that life inflicts on itself, Hegel stigmatizes Judaism as the opposite of his dialectics, which speculatively attempt to pinpoint the coincidence between being and non-being.[31] In a paradoxical manner, as Hegel would put it, the Jews' very spirituality (i.e., the perception of the material world as being correlated to God by way of creation) results in an absence of spirit. By not eating life (blood), the Jews, in Hegel's view, do not exert violence and, as a result, do not become its victims. As in Kant's anti-Semitic thought, the imagined immutability of a Jewish essence is seen to originate in the Jewish religion that shapes (via Rabbinic law) their way of life. The discourse about "the essence of Judaism" serves to "ground" and

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29. Hegel argues for the conflation of the transcendental and the empirical, whereby the latter turns out to be dead, thereby illustrating the truth of dialectical investigations: "But the essential objectivity must be *immediate and sensuous*. The immediate and the sensuous must be dead, for the bone is dead insofar as it partakes of life, and the spirit must be posited in it as real." G.W.H. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes,* ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 262.

30. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Vol. 2, ed. by Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1993), p. 352

31. Cf.: Michael Mack, "The Metaphysics of Eating: Jewish Dietary Laws and Hegel's Social Theory," in *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 27 (2001), pp. 59-88.

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to substantiate the essentialist fantasy about Jewishness. Thus, Hegel argues that the religion which perceives the absolute in immediate being is the most reprobate and the one most worthy of rejection,[32] for it does not attempt to leave the mark of an autonomous, mediating human spirit on the external world, but rather remains closed in itself.[33]

Hegel sets the stage for Feuerbach's and Wagner's focus on Jehovah as the source of the alleged immutability of anything that does not belong to a peculiar notion of redemption — realized either through reason (Kant's autonomy, Hegel's dialectics, Schopenhauer's overcoming and destruction of the world, and Feuerbach's equation of anthropology with theology) or through art (Wagner's total work of art). Within Hegel's narrative, Jews become enslaved to the empirical world by theologizing immediate being: God and material power are indistinguishable. Israel's God either destroys empirical life or he sustains it on the condition that his laws are followed. Thus, Hegel praises a Jewish religious sensibility only to place it on a materialist plane. Just as he depicts Israel's fear of God as ultimately a concern for material possessions, he maintains, having before called the Jews' faith "admirable," that this trust in God ultimately turns out to be hope attached to the happiness that can be found in empirical life.[34]

History translates "the essence of Christianity" into the working of the modern state. Feuerbach defines Christian essence (autonomy from the empirical world) in terms of a binary opposition to the Jews, who he sees as the embodiment of heteronomy. He adopts Hegel's idea that history is the realization of theology's ethical and political content. In keeping with the work of his transcendental predecessors, Feuerbach's revolution stops short of questioning the perceived rational "essence of Christianity": he does not set out to negate religion as such, but only "the inhuman" aspects appertaining to it.[35] He thus locates such inhumanity in the God of the Jews, who causes a rift between immanence and transcendence. Once again, Jehovah functions as the originator of a gulf between the empirical and the spiritual, which Hegel attempts to bridge by way of dialectics. Jehovah thus produces the divide between anthropology and theology that Feuerbach's "humanistic" thought sets out to overcome. But, along with Kant and Hegel, Feuerbach saw reason self-consciously growing out of

32. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Vol. II, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
33. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
34. Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 348.
35. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Reclam: Stuttgart, 1984), p. 23. See also Karl Löwith's "Nachwort" in *ibid.*, pp. 527-34.

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Gentile culture, which constructs Judaic culture as its other. Thus, Feuerbach contrasts "Christianity's religion of critique and freedom" with "the Israelite who does not dare to do anything except for that commanded by God."[36] Here, one finds the fear for "worldly goods" with which Wagner imbues his anti-Semitic stereotypes and which Hegel uses to "unmask" the spirituality of Israel.

In this prejudicial fantasy, timidity reveals an orientation to the "goods of this world," since fear here resides in fearing for the loss of "worldly goods." In this way, Feuerbach, like Hegel, associates Jewish obedience to God's commandments (or revealed laws) with the principle of utility. The characteristic of heteronomy (i.e., slavery to the objects of material life) immutably appertains to Jewish existence on account of what Feuerbach imagines to be the Jews' attachment to their God: "The Jews have kept their peculiarity up to the present day. Their principle, their God, is the practical principle of the world — egoism, i.e., the egoism in form of religion."[37] This conflation of the Jewish God with the imagined immutability of the Jewish people follows Kant's and Hegel's line of argument, and finds its way into Wagner's anti-Semitic imagination. Radicalizing Hegel, Feuerbach calls the Jewish God a product of the egoism of the Jews.[38] The veneration of God comes down to an admiration of God's power, and Feuerbach contrasts this "desire for *earthly happiness*" in Israel's religion with Christianity's "longing for *heavenly bliss*."[39]

As for Schopenhauer's anti-Semitism, it represents another instance of this line of thought, whose "universal" humanism excludes the Jews from a rational and free society. Significantly, Schopenhauer's critique of Kant's neglect of both the body and the will prepares the way for Wagner's paradigmatic shift, in which art occupies the place reason holds in German transcendental thought. Schopenhauer does not appraise the will and the body, but conceptualizes them in terms of the Kantian thing-in-itself: as the truth that lies behind the world of appearances. This fact makes his thought appear to be materialist, and yet recognition of the world's non-transcendental foundations should prepare the ground for both the overcoming and the final destruction of the mundane world.[40]

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36. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
40. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung. Zweiter Teilband* (Zurich: Diogenes, 1977), p. 413.

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Schopenhauer developed a quasi-religious aesthetic theory. Art, especially music, traces the ways in which "the world itself is the judgment upon the world."[41] If art works together with transcendental reason, in that it helps to recognize the guilty and utterly worthless constitution of the empirical world, then Schopenhauer's notion of religion describes this pessimistic worldview. His thought is religious only insofar as it evaluates the world in terms of "guilt" and "redemption."[42] Reason, art and religion meet in this epistemology, which results in an attitude, rather than in the suicidal enactment of a resigned form of pessimism. Schopenhauer thus introduces art into this transcendental paradigm, but, in contrast to his academic competitor, Hegel, he pays little attention to the body politic. The only exception is that he defines the Jewish as the political and, in so doing, radicalizes Hegel's and Feuerbach's charge against an imagined Jewish God, who represents nothing but the power over "earthly goods."

Reason as philosophy coincides with religion. Philosophy goes to the kernel of Christianity, and finds there its essence in radical opposition to the Jew. Following, Kant, Hegel, and Feuerbach, Schopenhauer constructs a notion of Jewish immutability, focusing on Judaism. The social life shaped by the immutability of a religious worldview divides an otherwise universal notion of humanity. Schopenhauer, for his part, partitions the world into two opposed religious ideologies: the Zend religion, represented by Judaism and Islam, and the Veda religion, of which Christianity partakes. Zend is driven by an optimistic attitude to the world, taking appearances for reality,[43] whereas the Veda recognize the world as mere appearance, and see the root of all evil in being,[44] the redemption from which is their highest aim. The Jews are Schopenhauer's main scapegoat. He does not discuss Islam in any detail, but focuses on Jews in order to expel the Judaic from Christianity. He accuses them of having infiltrated and subverted Christian culture by introducing a realist, as opposed to an idealist attitude. In Europe, transcendental thought has validity only in Kantian philosophy, and is, however, cut off from the life of the populace, precisely because of the influence of "a Jewish realist way of thought" on social life: "In India idealism is — in Brahmanism as well as in Buddhism

41. *Ibid.*, p. 438.

42. See Alfred Schmidt, *Die Wahrheit im Gewande der Lüge. Schopenhauers Religionsphilosophie* (Munich: Piper, 1986), p. 91.

43. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Der handschriftliche Nachlaß (1818-1830),* ed. by Arthur Hübscher (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), p. 307.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 308.

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— part of the teaching of popular religion; idealism is merely paradoxical in Europe, due to the essentially and inevitably realist Jewish position."[45]

Religion, Art, and Politics in Wagner's Theoretical Texts

Just as German Enlightenment philosophy attempted to reconcile reason with religion, so, too, Wagner set out to make art compatible with a rationality that has its grounds in a secularized understanding of Christianity. In his essay "Concerning State and Religion" (1864), he lets the artist proclaim Christ's "my realm is not of this world." He then goes on to ask how this transcendence of empirical life can be realized, taking into account that this "extra-worldly realm stands within this world."[46] He argues for a combination of aestheticism and politics in order to create a body politic in which the body can be truly transcended — in Schopenhauer's terms, overcome and destroyed. He employs a Hegelian argument in his description of such a translation of the body into the body politic, while abandoning a philosophy of the state, because the state does not overcome egoism, but rather reinforces the individual's egotistic desire for survival. Because of this worldly element, "religion is in its essence completely different from the state." Nevertheless, religion can only turn the worldly into the otherworldly by means of an alliance with the state. It is precisely here that Wagner refers to Hegel, proclaiming that "the highest and purest religion only appeared in the world exactly at the point at which it completely separated itself from the state and sublated the latter into itself."[47] Wagner thus draws on Hegel's *aufheben* to characterize the dialectical relation between religion and the state, in which the former abolishes and, at the same time, incorporates the existence of the latter.

Wagner conceptualizes religion as a means for overcoming an egoistic will to power. Religion thus seems to occupy the place that Kant and Hegel reserved for reason. In Wagner's theoretical writings, there is an obsession with Jewishness as the embodiment of egoism. Following Feuerbach's pseudo-theology, he attributes the immutability of race to the Jewish God, who turns out to be the principle of power. He conflates political power with the immutable "essence of Judaism," and proceeds to contrast his construction of a Jewish politics of power with Christianity's

45. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Urwille und Welterlösung. Ausgewählte Schriften* (Wiesbaden: Fourier, 1982), p. 131.

46. Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Julius Kapp (Leipzig: Hesse & Becker, 1920), Vol. 14, p. 11.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

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politics of religion.[48] By negating the world, religion abolishes the egoistic desire for both comfort and survival that propels individuals to live together in statehood. How can religion destroy the egoism implicit in the old state and, at the same time, found a new one, which negates an egoistic will for "earthly power"? Here, Wagner theorizes art in terms of the mediation between the body and a redemptive kind of body politic. He does so by evaluating the religious-political role of "delusion," one example of which is patriotism. The patriotic citizen abandons self-interest in the delusory belief that his selfhood and that of the state are identical. He is thus "overpowered by the delusion that lets the danger to the state appear to be infinitely intensified personal danger for whose aversion he sacrifices himself with a zeal that is equal to the intensity of his identification."[49]

This identification of the individual with the state radicalizes the Hegelian idea of totality in which the particular loses itself in the general.[50] It is no coincidence that Wagner employs Hegel's term *aufheben* in discussing the relation between religion and the state. Hegel acknowledges the egoistic reasons for which individuals come together and found states. However, he does not condemn these motivations, but emphasizes the idealism behind such social foundations. This becomes clear in the extreme case of war, when the rulers are able to teach their subjects "their master — death."[51] Wagner criticizes the "normal" case scenario, in which the members of a given state go after their own business. Through their optimistic trust in earthly activities, they evidence "egoism," and thereby the absence

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48. See Barry Millington, *Wagner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 106, where he argued that "what is idiosyncratic about Wagner's anti-semitism . . . is the way he lifted it into the realm of theology." This is also "idiosyncratic" about anti-Semitism in German transcendental thought.

49. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 14, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

50. Nietzsche called Wagner "Hegel's heir." See Friedrick Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter: 1967-77), p. 36. Adorno has elaborated the relations between Hegel and Wagner, in terms of their shared notion of totality. See Adorno, "Musikalische Aphorismen," in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 18 (*Musikalische Schriften* V), ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Klaus Schultz (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984), p. 23. For Hegel's influence on Wagner, see Siegfried Mauser, "Wagner und Hegel — Zum Nachwirken des Deutschen Idealismus im 'Ring des Nibelungen'," in *Schriften der Hochschule für Musik* 4 (1983), pp. 45-59; John Deathridge and Carl Dahlhaus, *The New Grove Wagner* (London: Macmillan, 1984); Sandra Corse, *Wagner and the New Consciousness: Language and Love in the Ring* (London: Associated University Press, 1990); and Petra-Hildegard Wilberg, *Richard Wagners Mythische Welt. Versuche wider den Historismus* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 1996), p. 124.

51. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

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of the "Christian essence." Schopenhauer keeps repeating that it consists in the pessimism fulfilled only in the overcoming and the eventual destruction of the world. The monarchical state that has been conflated with the essence of Christianity politicizes this Schopenhauerian pessimism, which is no longer pessimistic, insofar as Wagner believes in the attainment of autonomy gained by such enthusiastic acceptance of suffering for the sake of a general entity. Members of this religious state make themselves "independent from the world," by virtue of their "voluntary renunciation and suffering."[52] Thanks to a redemptive kind of body politic, the body can transcend itself even though it remains in this world.

According to Wagner, Kant's autonomy (independence from the world) can be realized through patriotism. In this way, a member of the *Volk* dispenses with all concerns about one's own welfare and thus offers one's life as a sacrifice for the "non-egoistic" good of a redemptive body politic. Patriotism turns the potentially egotistic structure of statehood — understood as a community of people working together only to mutually further their own self-interests — into a body politic that helps to realize the Kantian autonomy from all inclinations to "the goods of this world." This theory of patriotism and independence from the "worldly" bears on the development of Wagner's anti-Semitism. For, in keeping with the transcendental matrix, here "Jewishness" denotes Kantian heteronomy — the inclination of the self to objects in the empirical world. By the middle of the 19th century, the exchange system of capitalism stands as a trope for enslavement to the material world (even though Kant exemplifies autonomy in the acceptance of a mine-yours property distinction).

Wagner radicalizes Kant's notion of autonomy in a political manner, for it now describes independence from any form of exchange and contract. The autonomous member of the *Volk* gives one's life without any form of contractual agreement, and without any wish for any kind of return in exchange for one's sacrifice. Consequently, Wagner does not reject the state *in toto*; he only condemns the exchange forms that precondition an inorganic modern state.[53]

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52. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 14, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

53. As Zizek has pointed out, "antisemitism does not stand for anti-modernism as such, but for an attempt at combining modernity with social corporatism, which is characteristic of conservative revolutionaries." Accordingly, the "opposition of German true spirit versus the 'Jewish' principle is not the original one: there is a third term, modernity, the reign of exchange, of the dissolution of organic links, of modern industry and individuality. . . . " See Slavoj Zizek, "'There is no Sexual Relationship': Wagner as a Lacanian," in *New German Critique* 69 (Fall, 1996), p. 14.

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Wagner's anti-Semitism is closely related to his revision of a transcendental paradigm. If in the 18th century reason was the medium through which humanity could attain "freedom" as autonomy from empirical reality, then, by mid-19th century, it is art that promises to link the individual to the *Volk*'s organic unity. Thus, art triggers a patriotism that makes the individual independent of any inclination to the "goods of this world." This paradigm shift from reason to art, as media of redemption, goes hand-in-hand with the change in anti-Semitic stereotyping. While reason represents the "modern," the Jews are stigmatized as the "non-moderns" and the "primitives." Judaism is labeled "superstitious" and "irrational."[54]

With the advance of industrial society, the focus starts to shift, and the Jews are blamed for the injustices perceived to accompany modernizations.[55] Thus, Jews embody the threat of modernity. Within this context, Wagner blames the Jews for the "egoism" of modern bourgeois society, and defines the capitalist exchange system, *qua* Kantian heteronomy. By rejecting the materialism of modern society, Wagner does not abandon modernity as such. Instead, and more specifically, he does not reject the "modern" transcendental paradigm introduced by Kant's philosophical revolution. He only shifts the focus from reason to art. Thanks to the public impact of art, a redemptive body politic can found the otherworldly within the world. The Jews are still phantasmic representatives of the worldly. However, the way out of this world is no longer related to rational abstraction, but to the artistic sensibilities that appeal to the emotions and direct the individual to autonomy (understood in terms of independence from any inclinations to the empirical world as finally realized in patriotic self-sacrifice).

Does not art generate a delusory state of being, and in so doing create spurious identifications in which the concerns of the particular (the individual) and the general (the state) coincide? Wagner poses this kind of rhetorical question throughout his theoretical writings. Art replaces the contemporary world of exchange and egoism with the conscious delusion of idealism. Wagner speaks of artistic achievement in the context of this medial work that helps to translate the body into the body politic. "The conscious delusion,"[56] created by the work of art, helps to do away with

54. Maurice Olender, *The Language of Paradise: Race, Religion and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, tr. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

55. See, e.g., Werner Sombart, *The Jews and Modern Capitalism*, tr. by M. Epstein (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1951).

56. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 14, *op. cit.*, p.33.

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the contemporary reality and thus works for an idealist future.

Wagner wants to lay the ground for "the realization of the ideal"[57] that is accomplished only in the translation and (thereby self-negation) of the body into the body politic. In order to speak to a mass of bodies, art must become popular — it must be people-centered. Here Wagner sees in Schiller's theater "the attempt at its elevation to a popular-idealist art."[58] This popularization of idealism turns the people into protagonists of an idealist narrative. Thus, it does not abandon Kantian autonomy but, on the contrary, widens its sphere of influence, thanks to the appeal of art (theater). Indeed, art, autonomy, and the German people form a unity in Wagner's thought. German has become the synonym for idealism. The word "German means to do what one does for its own sake," whereas the principle of worldly gain, i.e., the "essence of utility"[59] describes anything opposed to the sphere of idealist power.

In contrast to Schopenhauer, Wagner believes in the possible investment of idealism with real power, a hope that he shares with Hegel's attempt to bridge the gap between the spiritual and empirical. In this context, he discusses art as the medium that could help to close the divide between state and religion. Art could mobilize the people for a patriotic loss of individual selfhood, which, as a result of this loss, partakes of statehood. Yet, this translation of the body into the body politic cannot be enacted without the support of a political system that sets out to incorporate the state into a religious apparatus of suffering. This politico-religious structure works for one's complete independence from worldly concerns — which is why Wagner asks for the help of political rulers and, even in his revolutionary period,[60] argues for a corporatist monarchy. That is to say, he celebrates an ideal monarch who decrees the socio-political measures by which the heteronomy of particular bodies is translated into the autonomy of the general body politic. The monarch represents the autonomous body and, as such, embodies the Wagnerian body politic.

Here, Wagner conflates the two bodies of the king and makes out of the body politic a union of both Christ's and society's lifeblood. As representative of autonomy and politics, as the realization of the otherworldly within this world, the monarch enacts "negative freedom" from

57. *Ibid.*, p.76.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
59. *Ibid.*, p.101.
60. For a discussion of Wagner's monarchism, see Wilberg, *Richard Wagners Mythische Welt*, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

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heteronomy (as described by the Kantian notion of autonomy), for he "is already and totally unbound by the law of utility that binds the whole of the state."[61] Untouched by the principle of heteronomy implicit in the question regarding the use of empirical objects for the welfare of the self, the king is completely autonomous and thus "completely liberated."

There is, however, a more realistic dimension to Wagner's glorification of the monarch as the embodiment of the autonomous body politic. Potentially, the king can provide real power to erect such an autonomous political system in which art popularizes idealism, or rather, in which it would confirm the idealism already inherent in the *Volk*. Wagner argues that the German prince should become like the German artist. He should dwell close to the pulse of the German people and their alleged idealism, because he yields the crucial ingredient of power lacking in both the idealism of art and that of the *Volk*. German politics founds "an order of world-redemption" on the precondition that Germany's princes acquire as much German, i.e., idealist-Christian essence, as its artists have in the past.[62]

Following Feuerbach, Wagner accuses the Jews of holding this power for selfish and, therefore heteronomous ends. Wagner claims that in the hands of the German people and their artists power would be self-consuming. It would translate any member of the *Volk* into the body politic — something autonomous, to the point of operating "for its own" sake, instead of being bound to heteronomy (to the practical concerns of utility). As with Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Schopenhauer, in Wagner's anti-Semitic imagination the Jews exemplify the principle of heteronomy; be it called utilitarian or egoistic, Jews are always blamed for an orientation to the "goods of this world." Even though the paradigm of "world redemption" shifts from reason to art, the anti-Semitic aspect of German transcendental thought also determines Wagner's racism and, here too, the immutable resides in religion, rather than in biology. In "Judaism in Music," he posits Jewish immutability in the Jewish God: "But the Jew has stood quite apart from this community [the historical community of European nations], alone with his Jehovah in a dispersed and barren stock, incapable of real evolution, just as his own Hebraic language has been handed down as something dead."[63] This shows how Wagner links the immutability of race to the "inseparable link" between the Jews and their God. The

61. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 14, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
62. *Ibid.*, p.102.
63. Richard Wagner, *Stories and Essays,* selected, edited, and introduced by Charles Osborne (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1991) 27-28.

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inability to undergo evolution originates in the consecration to Jehovah, in the fixed "standing quite apart and alone with Jehovah"[64]

If Kant sees the origin of the Jews in their superstition, if Hegel makes the Jewish God responsible for the fear for material possessions, and if Feuerbach calls Jehovah "the principle of power," Wagner equates the Jewish God with heteronomy as such. A crucial differences between Wagner and the German philosophers has to do with his increasing politicization of anti-Semitism. He attempts to mobilize a mass movement against the integration of Jews into German civil society, precisely because he sees them as a threat to the realization of an idealized homogenous community. Paradoxically, he equates Jewishness with power and, at the same time, sets out to organize power against the Jews. This paradox ultimately comes down to the absence of power, which Wagner associates with both art and the German people. The Jews possess what is lacking in Wagner's idealistic Germans. In "Elucidations on Judaism in Music," he points out to the *Volk* that "the power, which we were lacking, belonged to the Jews."[65] Why does he speak in the past tense rather than in the present? Wagner sees his art in terms of a revenge on Jehovah, which consist in taking power away from the Jews; thus outdoing their God, who originally has given it to "them," first in the Old Testament, and then through what Wagner imagines to be "the Jewish infiltration" ("Jewification") of Christian culture (following Fichte and Schopenhauer, he believes in an Aryan Christ).[66]

Indeed, Wagner takes up Hegel's fantasy about obedience to Rabbinic law, which allegedly preconditions God's help in securing worldly possessions. However, he radicalizes the Hegelian charge when he argues that the "tribal God of this small people promised those who belong to him, the future domination of the whole world, including everything that is alive and active, as long as they strictly keep his laws."[67] Wagner's anti-Semitic imagination blames Jehovah and the Jews for Christianity's rise to political power, thus fearing the Jew behind the Christian — an anti-Semitic figure of thought to which Nietzsche referred too, albeit it in a different context.[68] The "corruption of Christian religion" originates in

64. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 13, *op. cit.*, p.13.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
66. For a discussion of the "Aryan Christ" in Fichte, see Rose, *Revolutionary Antisemitism*, *op. cit.*, p. 122. For a discussion of the "Aryan Christ" in Schopenhauer, see Schmidt, *Die Wahrheit im Gewand der Lüge*, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
67. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 14, *op. cit.*, p.150.
68. Sander L. Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 150-51.

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"the inclusion of Jewishness in the constructions of its dogmas."[69] The inclusion of what Wagner imagines to be "the principle of power" (i.e., Jewishness) paradoxically turns out to weaken Christian culture and society, such that the emergence of the Jew, as an influential force, points to the illness of the body politic. Wagner employs the metaphor of the body to drive home the point of a society in a state of "corruption": "Only when a body's inner death is evident can outside elements gain entry, and then only to destroy it."[70] Thus, anything that has fallen prey to the power of corruption reveals the face of the Jew: Jewishness signifies the "defaming conscience of our modern civilization,"[71] as an example of which Wagner singles out the popularity of Heinrich Heine's works.

Wagner follows Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Schopenhauer in attributing the racist notion of immutability to the Jewish religion. This religion turns out to be one without religious content — what Kant calls "superstition" — insofar as the "true religion" emerges from the wish to gain autonomy from any reliance on the material world. In trying to gain power over empirical life, the Jew as Christian still follows Jehovah, for "he [the Jew] has in truth no religion, but only the belief in certain promises of his God, which, unlike in every true religion, are not at all related to ex temporal life, which transcends real life, but exclusively refers to contemporary life on earth, on which the tribe indeed remains assured of its domination over all living and lifeless objects."[72]

Wagner praises Schopenhauer for having followed Kant in attempting to free Christianity from Jehovah. After having established that self-knowledge results in the recognition of the "Jew within," Wagner calls Schopenhauer the "enactor of Kant," since both "prepared the ground for a true ethics," in which "the Christian world is cleared from its over thousand year long confusion with the Jewish notion of God."[73] This statement about the confusion, which extends over a millennium, is linked to Wagner's striking assessment of progress in the history of philosophy. He posits the absence of a breakthrough in the more than 2000 years divide that separates Plato from Kant: ". . . there has not been any real progress from Plato to Kant."[74] In his view, Western philosophy had been "corrupted"

69. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 14, *op. cit.*, p.151.
70. Wagner, *Stories and Essays*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
72. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 14, *op. cit.*, p. 190.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
74. See Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher 1 1869-1877*, ed. by Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack (Munich: Piper, 1976), p. 241.

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by Jewish influences, until Kant "liberated" it from such "infection."

If the German Enlightenment philosophers constructed a notion of universality based on humanity's endowment of reason (an endowment lacking in "superstitious" people, thus limiting the supposed universality of the "rational"), Wagner imbues art with humanist associations by making it speak to the whole of the people, regardless of class difference. Yet, his art stops short of speaking to the Jews and, thereby, follows the trajectory of German transcendental reason. Wagner discusses the dilemma of the German humanists at the beginning of "Judaism in Music," when he writes in the voice of the "Enlightenment liberator," identifying with the "we" who "proposed the freedom for the Jews with no knowledge of the race."[75]

Race turns out to be the inseparable union between Jews and Jehovah's power. Thus, the fight for universal emancipation stops short of including the Jews, since it is Jewishness from which the people must be emancipated: "it is we who require to fight for emancipation from the Jew . . . the Jew is more than emancipated . . . he is the ruler."[76] Thus, Wagner's "all-inclusive art" comes down to the unification of the people against their rulers, who reside outside the people's universality, rather than within it, such that it is no longer the princes or the factory owners, but the Jews who are the exploiters.[77] Indeed, the power of the real rulers (monarchs and capitalists) should be united with that of the workers.

Wagner tries to secure this power through art, which addresses both German rulers and German people. In "What is German?" he demands that "the princes must found their new alliance with the people."[78] Idealism, as Wagner understands it, gains power through such an alliance. He associates power with Jewishness. In Jewish hands, power is heteronomous, it is power over "the goods of this world," used (principle of utility) for selfish ends (principle of egoism). Whereas, in German hands, power enables the "redemption of the world," through its overcoming in a state of autonomous indifference to one's position in empirical reality. Thus, the prejudicial exclusion of the Jews from the Germans has its ground in the transcendental opposition between autonomy and heteronomy, between spirit and matter, between worldly power and idealist powerlessness.

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75. Wagner, *Stories and Essays*, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
77. On the conflation of "Jews" and exploiters, see Adorno's *Versuch über Wagner*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 13 (Die Musikalischen Monographien), ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), pp. 23-25.
78. Wagner, *Stories and Essays*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

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Staging the Autonomy-Heteronomy Divide

In his *Ring Cycle,* Wagner puts this transcendental divide on stage. He consciously sets out to popularize this opposition in order to mobilize the people against the Jews. Thus, "art has passed judgment on the Jewish God," whereas "Jehovah has not much to say to the faithful soul of the people."[79] Wagner triumphs over "Jehovah," who cannot compete with homogenous "people-power." This power is mobilized through the translation of an anti-Semitic paradigm into the emotional language of the total work of art, which "resolves the tension between concept and sentiment."[80] Wagner portrays contemporary society in terms of an heteronymous bondage to the material world.

He equates "the tragic ring of the Nibelungen" with the "stock market portfolio that brings to completion the horrid picture of world domination."[81] In "Religion and Art," he paints the anti-Semitic image of "the Jew with the prosy stock market bell."[82] The ring turns out to be a symbol of capitalism's heteronomy in the same way as the Jew executes such enslavement to selfish enjoyment, gained by means of the domination over both lively and lifeless objects. Against this background, the illuminating analysis of the Nibelungen as anti-Semitic stereotypes can be extended to all those characters[83] who want to keep the ring in order to raise the prospect of progress within the material world. Except for Siegfried and possibly Brünhilde and the Rhine maidens, all protagonists of the *Ring Cycle* depict Wagner's racist fear of a European society that has become infiltrated by "Jehovah's principle of power." Thus, the gods are called "light-elves,"[84] in order to demonstrate their relation to the Nibelungen, who are called "black-elves."[85] Significantly, Wotan's first appraisal of his mighty new castle (scene two of *Das Rheingold*) follows Alberich's robbery of the

79. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 14, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 186.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
83. David J. Levin, *Richard Wagner, Fritz Lang and the Nibelungen. The Dramaturgy of Disavowal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); and Leon Stein, *The Racial Thinking of Richard Wagner* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950). Jacob Katz, *The Dark Side of Genius. Richard Wagner's Anti-Semitism* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1986) separates Wagner's opera's from his theoretical writings.
84. Richard Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, ed. by Wilhelm Zentner (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1996), p. 30.
85. Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

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ring.[86] Critics, who want to shift the focus away from Wagner's anti-Semitism, while concentrating on the social criticism of the *Ring Cycle*, take Wotan's possessiveness to be the revolutionary critique of a politics of power.[87] This leaves out an analysis of Wagner's theoretical writings. Here, he makes the Jew responsible for a politics of material power, against which he sets the idealist power of art, backed up by the *Volk*'s patriotic idealism.

Wotan "is what he is only through contracts,"[88] and thus exemplifies modernity's contractual-utilitarian principle, for which Wagner blames the Jews. But Wotan also desires the ring, and thereby evidences his heteronomy. Tellingly, Wagner employs the same word for Wotan's as for Alberich's inclination to "the goods of this world," as symbolized by the ring: in *Das Rheingold* the dwarf commands that "you should lust for gold,"[89] and the curse has in fact come true in *Die Walküre*, where Wotan confesses that "he has lustfully held the gold in his hands."[90] Wotan wants the ring as soon as he hears about its use values, about its promise of "world domination," and that takes place before Alberich utters his curse. After Loge informs Wotan of the ring's magic that makes its owner "gain" possession of "the world,"[91] he explodes: "I must have the ring!"[92]

How did the ring become the ring? This question lies behind Wotan, Fafner and Fasolt's sudden obsession with "the gold." The issue of causation refers back to the beginning of the cycle, where representation gives way to narration.[93] But, narration implies movement and action within the material world in which plots unfold with respect to desires for specific empirical objects, such as the ring. Alberich's robbery of the ring kicks off narration, and introduces the principle of heteronomy. It is Alberich's inclination to "the goods of this world" that makes him lust for power beyond any measure. His desire is always bound to the enjoyment derived from objects within material reality, be it sexual desire or the joys yielded

86. On the relation between Alberich and Wotan, see Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices. Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 172. On the parallels between Wotan and Kundry, see Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, Vol. 4 (New York: Knopf, 1946), p. 603.

87. See Udo Bermbach, "Politik und Anti-Politik im Kunst-Mythos," in Udo Bermbach and Dieter Borchmeyer, eds., *Richard Wagners "Ring des Nibelungen. Ansichten des Mythos* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1995), p. 39-58.

88. Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

90. Richard Wagner, *Die Walküre*, ed. by Egon Voss (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997), p. 53.

91. Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

93. For a discussion of this point see Levin's *Richard Wagner*, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-95.

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from social domination. Alberich does not turn the ring into a medium of transcendental freedom from the empirical (as is the case with Siegfried), since he values his life more than mere possession of "the gold."

If Alberich lost his life, he would also lose the use value yielded by the ring. For this reason, he bows to Wotan's demands, in a scene that stands in striking contrast to Siegfried's intransigence, when confronted by the warnings of the Rhine maidens at the beginning of *Götterdämmerung*'s third act. Alberich does not forsake his "life and body" for the principle of autonomy with which Siegfried willingly foregoes his life and — true to Wagner's definition of "German essence" — keeps the ring for its own sake. In contrast to Siegfried, Alberich "frees his life and body"[94] — Siegfried makes use of the same words when he refuses to hand over the ring to the Rhine maidens — even if this means the loss of the ring.

This illustrates that for Alberich "the gold" is only a means that enables the enjoyment of "the goods of this world." By contrast, Siegfried, does not know and is not interested in the use-value of the ring in his possession. As he makes clear to Hagen, he is "ignorant of the power within it [the ring]."[95] Alberich emphasizes this point in the dialogue with his son Hagen: "Because he does not know the worth of the ring, he does not make use of the enviable power."[96] Clearly, for Siegfried the ring has no use value; rather than using it as means to enhance his position within the empirical world, the value of "gold" paradoxically consists in putting an end to all use values. A few scenes before the actual enactment of the apocalyptic twilight of the gods, the Rhine maidens entreat Siegfried to hand the ring over to them. When Siegfried offers the ring to the maidens, as a present, he is warned of the catastrophe that endangers him were he to keep the ring. This is enough to reverse "the hero's" generosity. In stark contrast to Alberich, who hands over the ring when he is faced with choosing between his life and the ring, Siegfried refuses to hand it over, precisely because it endangers his position within the material world. Thus, Siegfried emphasizes his autonomy from any concerns as regards his welfare: "But with the threat to my life and to my body, even if it were not worth a trifle, you could not wrest the ring away from me."[97] Wagner dwells on his "hero's" transcendental freedom, for Siegfried goes on to

94. Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
95. Richard Wagner, *Götterdämmerung*, ed. by Egon Voss Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997), p. 27.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

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illustrate his disregard for life and body with a gesture: "For life and body . . . see! how I throw them far away from me!"[98]

Siegfried throws a piece of earth far away, thus illustrating his distance from the "earthly." By willingly endangering his "life and body," he proves his transcendental freedom from empirical conditions and material interests. With Siegfried, the ring symbolizes the eschatological redemption from the world and thereby from heteronomy, i.e., from the orientation to "the goods of this world." By willingly endangering his life and body, and thereby refusing to return the ring to the Rhine maidens, Siegfried sets the path for the "night of annihilation,"[99] which ends the *Ring Cycle*. The ending coincides with the beginning, so that narration again gives way to representation.

Thanks to its hero's fearlessness, the plot driven by heteronomous desire outdoes itself.[100] As the material basis of its construction, narration embodies the foreign element of Wagner's art, denoting it as the Jewish principle of power otherwise defined in the conceptual designation "heteronomy." Heteronomy and its related characteristics constitute anti-Semitic stereotyping in German transcendental philosophy. By celebrating, in an intended popular mode, the destruction of a society shaped by heteronomy, Wagner sets out to pass judgment on Jehovah, whom he believes to have infiltrated European society. Thus, not only are the Nibelungen anti-Semitic stereotypes, but so are the gods and the giants; in short, all those who lust for "the gold" as a means of enjoying worldly goods.

By "freely" disregarding any threat to his own life and body, Siegfried's attitude points to the translation of the body into the body politic — the idealism of such "selfless" translation Wagner perceives most clearly in the patriotic identification of the individual with the *Volk*. Politicizing German idealist thought, Wagner excludes Jews from the *Volk* by stigmatizing them as the opposite of the idealist principle of autonomy. Siegfried's autonomous attitude, which consists in his refusal to return the ring *in exchange* for his life and body, thus builds the cornerstone of Wagner's attempted popularization of the anti-Semitic stereotype implicit in the German transcendental divide between autonomy and heteronomy.

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98. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
99. Richard Wagner, *Siegfried*, ed. by Egon Voss Stuttgart: Reclam, 1998), p. 123.
100. For a discussion of the opposition between Siegfried's and the Nibelungen's fearfulness, see Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

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Decisions, Decisions: Derrida on Kierkegaard and Abraham

Dominic Moran

Over the last 15 years or so, there has been an attempt by Derrida and some of his exegetes to show that deconstruction, in some vital if necessarily paradoxical way, is bound with or makes possible ethics, justice, and political responsibility.[1] Uppermost is the question of *decision* in particular and of *decisiveness* in general. Before addressing any specific issues, it is important to consider how and why this politicization of deconstruction may have come about. As Geoffrey Bennington remarks, there has always been an expectation or even a demand that deconstruction "*should* give rise to a politics or a political philosophy."[2] According to such a view, any self-respecting philosopher is all but obliged to justify his work on ethical and political grounds. Of course, this expectation is not politically neutral, and constitutes precisely the sort of preconception that deconstruction would wish to question. The often reiterated charge against deconstruction is not

1. See, e.g., "Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion," in *Limited Inc*, ed. by Gerald Graff, tr. by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlmann (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988); *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, tr. by Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); "Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority," tr. by M. Quaintance, in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. by D. Cornell, M. Rosenfeld and D. G. Carlson (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 3-67; *Specters of Marx*, tr. by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994); *The Gift of Death*, tr. by David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); *Politics of Friendship*, tr. by George Collins (London: Verso, 1997); "Faith and Knowledge," in *Religion*, with Gianni Vattimo (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 1-78; *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, tr. by Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); *Adieu to Emmanuel Lévinas* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

2. Geoffrey Bennington, "Derrida and the Political," in *Interrupting Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 18.

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simply that it abstained from politics, as do many branches of philosophy, but that it is a form of radical relativism, indeed nihilism, which could only have pernicious political consequences if the stark set of ontological and epistemological conclusions to which it *seemed* inexorably to point were put into practice. Matters came to a head with the infamous Paul de Man affair in 1987, with the discovery of overtly anti-Semitic articles he had written for the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* during WWII.[3]

This is not the place to consider the philosophical "dilemmas" and *apologiae* to which the resulting scandal gave rise. That incident, however, precipitated a sea-change in Derrida's writing. Even Bennington concedes that it may not have been "coincidental that most of Derrida's more explicit political reflections have appeared since that time."[4] The "politics" *implicit* in this change of direction are themselves questionable. On the one hand, deconstruction apparently has no obligation to address politics or to take any firm political stance. Since it is anti-foundational and, consequently, ateleological, it provides "no grounds for any doctrinal epistemology, ontology or ethics."[5] On the other hand, when a particular act, as in this case de Man's writings, seems to cast serious ethical doubt on some of deconstruction's most important quasi-principles (its radical destabilizing of the concepts of subjectivity, authority, intention, and univocal meaning), it appeals to that very tribunal before which it need not appear. Since the de Man scandal, deconstruction and its practitioners have been vociferous in claiming for deconstruction the sort of sound political credentials which characterize their liberal opponents — even if the politics in question must first be given a supposedly transformative deconstructive twist.[6]

Of course, one could see such reorientation as no more than a matter of expediency or mere face-saving. Derrida's own dubious defence of de Man[7]

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3. The best general account of this is David Lehman's *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man* (London: André Deutsch, 1991). If some of his remarks concerning the philosophical nature of deconstruction are open to question, his account of the details of the controversy is often devastating.

4. Bennington, "Derrida and the Political," *op. cit.*, p. 19.

5. Bennington, "Jacques Derrida," in *Interrupting Derrida*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

6. These debates have helped to reinvigorate deconstruction, which many intellectuals considered on the wane, both philosophically and in terms of its popularity.

7. That defence appeared as "Like the Sound of the Sea Deep within a Shell: Paul de Man's War," tr. by Peggy Kamuf, in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1988), pp. 590-652, and was subsequently backed up in "Biodegradables: Seven Diary Fragments," tr. by Peggy Kamuf in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (1989), pp. 812-73. Lehman provides an excellent account of the debates which provoked these pieces and of the critical responses to them in *Signs of the Times*, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-258.

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has been viewed in precisely this way, and one might feel tempted to reject his more recent claims that deconstruction is "justice" and "democracy" in a highly qualified sense, on similar grounds. There is a sense in which deconstruction's "active" engagement with ethics is not simply a defensive reaction to the de Man affair, but the final stage in what has always been something of a rearguard action, in which it has constantly been asked to justify itself ethically. To a degree, therefore, that engagement occurs by default. However, as Derrida has rightly argued, his detractors have tended to reject his work on the basis of a series of supposedly self-evident "Enlightenment" values which they have failed to uphold in their often scandalously uninformed readings of his texts.[8]

A Necessary Impossibility

Before examining what Derrida says about decision, one comment on something about which he fails or chooses not to, but which acts as a critical preface to his entire discourse, i.e., that before writing a word he has already decided, in Kantian fashion, that he knows already what sort of thing a decision is, that to decide to analyze decision is entirely legitimate and philosophically unproblematic. This apparently trivial, but in fact utterly vexed premise, seems to have been tacitly accepted or else overlooked by his commentators, none of whom questions what, in the context, would seem to be a radically problematic assumption.[9] The point is that Derrida goes on to claim that the question of what a decision is (and of whether there is any such thing as a decision), "is," as it were, the very question of decision, at once the most decisive and least decidable of questions. It turns out that there is a sense in which one can never decide what a decision is or when and if it takes place. Yet, despite this apparent impasse, when Derrida begins his disquisition, everything has effectively been decided in advance; it is as if, leaving barely a trace, the whole drama of

8. See, e.g., "*Honoris Causa*: 'This is also extremely funny'," tr. by Marian Hobson and Christopher Johnson, in *Points . . . Interviews 1974-1994* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 399-421, and, more recently, in "Reading 'beyond the beginning'." See also the "Venom in Letters," which appears as the postscript to *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, tr. by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 104-8.

9. The same might be said of a number of the other ethical concepts Derrida has reformulated in deconstructive terms. See "On Forgiveness," in *Jacques Derrida: On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, tr. by Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 27-60. Here, Derrida seems to assume that, above and beyond its conceptual elaborations or actual manifestations, there is simply such a thing as forgiveness, which can be (intuitively?) recognized. His own, typically hyperbolical reworking of the concept actually depends on such an assumption.

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decision has been played out before the curtain rises. This muted drama, which is not simply an event in time, and which, in another strange temporal inversion, is instantaneously fashioned by or at least becomes detectable as a consequence of the thinking to which its resolution gives rise, ought to be the focus of critical attention. In particular, it becomes clear just how much has taken place behind the scenes before the more obvious drama of Derrida's argument (which is more of a detached epilogue or endnote) gets underway.[10]

Essentially, Derrida has only one thing to say about decisions: they are "impossible." By this he means that any "decision" that can be reached through calculation or in accordance with some established program is not a decision at all. All such "decisions" are *irresponsible*, because they are effectively precoded and thus neutralized even "before" they occur. Put simply, nothing can be decided in advance. Instead, for a decision to be truly decisive and thus responsible, it must be taken in the face of the incalculable, of what cannot be predetermined. It must, as the word implies, cut itself off from the calculable. Lest this should sound like an invitation to absolute recklessness, Derrida adds a caveat: "The instant of decision must remain heterogeneous to all knowledge as such, to all theoretical or reportive determination, even if *it may or must be preceded by all science and conscience*. The latter are unable to determine the leap of decision without transforming it into the irresponsible application of a program, hence without depriving it of what makes it a sovereign and free decision."[11] In other words, one must approach a decision *as if* it could be calculated, only to abandon, whether one likes it or not, *all* calculation at the decisive moment.[12] This momentary suspension of knowledge has nothing to do with "haziness and mobility, the confusion preceding knowledge or renouncing all truth."[13] It is not simply some unfortunate but generally bridgeable (and hence insignificant) hiatus

10. Derrida has had much to say about the revelatory eloquence of what remains unsaid or has been silenced, despite the fact that he insists that deconstruction is not a form of philosophical psychoanalysis, seems to assume that his own work is less susceptible (if not completely invulnerable) to similar soundings (presumably, because it *does* espy what has previously gone unnoticed). In the case of the decision, the drama played out in his own work (behind closed doors) in the "time before the first" is of vital importance.

11. Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

12. Derrida wonders whether the decision is an event which takes place in time as this has been conceived traditionally, since it "occurs" as an absolute rift with its own "pre-history" and in the face of an entirely incalculable future. See *Politics of Friendship*, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-6. See also *The Gift of Death*, *op. cit.*, p. 65, where he says that the instant of decision "remains irreducible to presence or to presentation . . . it belongs to an atemporal temporality, to a duration which cannot be grasped."

13. Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

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in the order of knowledge and one's responsibility to that knowledge, i.e., the sort of uncertainty which probability theory, not to mention basic "practicality," can so often satisfactorily resolve, but rather a necessary condition for that responsibility.[14] Thus, "the only possible decisions" are "impossible ones."[15]

As with so many of Derrida's more dazzling formulations, this one appears to be at once irrefutable and deeply problematic, as well as possibly irrelevant. It immediately invites a whole series of questions. If one is obliged to take into account "all possible science and conscience," should one not indefinitely postpone making anything resembling a decision, since such an operation must itself be interminable?[16] Would not to do otherwise be "irresponsible"? If not, at what point does one "decide" that one has taken sufficient — or perhaps "reasonable" — account of what is necessarily a boundless context?[17] In other words, how does one pass from the undecidable to the decision, for this is surely something which happens countless times? No doubt, Derrida would argue that there are no answers to such questions. How could there be, if impossibility is what potentiates decision? This may be unsatisfactory for those who would simply demand some "resolution," whether practical or otherwise, of the decision, but this is hardly the point. Yet, one can go further with this line of questioning.

As already indicated, Derrida claims that one must strive to achieve the greatest possible awareness of the context in which one is to make a decision before leaving that entire context and whatever implications it may suggest behind in the "insane" moment when one decides, or at least thinks that one does. But if this is the case, what is the point of premeditation at all? Why agonize when, despite one's best efforts to calculate and foreclose, it is precisely one's radical inability to do so that leads one to agonize in the first place? Moreover, since conscientious premeditation involves

14. Derrida distinguishes his notion of incalculability from probability theory, which always operates within the ideal horizon of certainty/determinability, in "Fidelité à plus d'un," in *Idiomes, nationalités, déconstructions: Rencontre de Rabat avec Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Intersignes, 1998), pp. 245-6.

15. See Derrida, "Dialanguages," in *Points . . .* , *op. cit.*, p. 147.

16. Bennington can only rephrase the paradox: "Derrida will maintain that . . . theorizing and interpretation are structurally interminable and can never prepare for the interruptive and precipitate moment of decision or action, but that the decisiveness of the decision none the less depends on its structural relation to interminable analysis." See "Derrida and the Political," *op. cit.*, p. 25. This is as accurate and concise a summary as one could wish for, but it still seems to leave many vital questions unanswered.

17. Indeed, who precisely has decided that any such contextualization is a necessary pretext for the decision? Derrida (as he often does) makes this point as if it were simple common sense, but it seems entirely questionable in this context.

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weighing a possible decision *as if it were part of a program*, or at least a link in a chain of more or less foreseeable consequences, is not to premeditate a decision *irresponsible*, precisely because by premeditating one attempts to limit (and ideally to eliminate) its de-cisiveness (in the radical sense outlined by Derrida) for the sake of some particular goal or other? Would it not be more de-cisive, and thus more responsible, simply to make a *salto mortale*? Moreover, by advocating the most painstaking forethought, is not Derrida still subscribing to the classical, "probabilistic" model of the decision, according to which one decides as if one had foreknowledge of the outcome of one's decision? The "time" of decision is paradoxical, involving as it does a "present" projection of the "future" into the "past." It functions according to what Derrida might term retrospectrality.[18]

Yet, is it not on the basis of possible future retrospection that Derrida calls for circumspection before a decision? Does this not imply that he believes that the passage from virtuality to actuality can somehow be "controlled," and that some decisions are "better," more responsible than others, even though his theory of decision would permit no such distinctions?[19] His "answer" is frustratingly, but symptomatically inconclusive: "Without the opening of an absolutely undetermined possible, without the radical abeyance and suspense marking a *perhaps*, there would never be either event or decision. Certainly [!]. But nothing takes place and nothing is ever decided without suspending the *perhaps* while keeping its living possibility in living memory. If no decision (ethical, juridical, political) is possible without interrupting determination by engaging oneself in the *perhaps*, on the other hand, the same decision must interrupt the very thing that is its condition of possibility: the *perhaps* itself. In the order of law, politics or morality, what would rules and laws, contracts and institutions indeed be without steadfast determination, without calculability and without violence done to the *perhaps*, to the possible that makes them possible?"[20] Is anything really added here?

18. In Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, *op. cit.*, p. 25, Derrida refers to an originary "noncontemporaneity of the present time with itself," which makes ontology into a *hauntology*, as the very possibility of temporization.

19. As any reading of his responses to his critics will demonstrate, Derrida is clear about what constitutes a valid decision regarding the coherence and import of his work. Prior to his work dealing specifically with decision, Derrida had repeatedly used the verb "decide" in a wholly conventional manner. As is often the case with deconstruction, selective retrospection will no doubt demonstrate that this was not the case.

20. See Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, *op. cit.*, p. 67. The *perhaps* here refers to the radical unforeseeability of the future, which Derrida has, at least since *Of Grammatology*, often referred to as the monstrousness of the future, which is what makes the future possible.

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Derrida says nothing about the way in which the relative steadfastness of institutions might influence particular decisions. More paradoxically still, does it not follow from Derrida's argument that the only person able to make a decision would be someone to whom the very word "decision" meant nothing, represented no ethical concept, because such a person would be unable to premeditate in the potentially irresponsible way outlined above?[21] By the same token, would such a person be *deciding* at all? If so, one cannot but conclude that even minimal knowledge of what a decision is or might be would prevent one from ever taking one (making even the impossible impossible), since *any* such knowledge could not but associate the decision with the sort of approximate programming, the attempt to predetermine consequences and thereby circumscribe or pre-comprehend the future, that Derrida associates with irresponsibility. Would this not make Derrida's own theory of decision, whatever its apparent radicality and open-endedness, *irresponsible*, because it too attempts such a pre-comprehension, even if what it pre-comprehends is the future's non-precomprehensibility?[22] Is his not also a form of program, albeit one whose algorithms run according to *différential* equations? At this point, it is only fair to consider an example, even if it is one the exemplarity of which must necessarily come into question,[23] in light of the notion it is intended to exemplify (perhaps exemplarity is at stake here).[24]

The Fortunes of Abraham

First of all, Derrida *decided* to select the story of Abraham and Isaac as an example. At least, he *may have* decided. After all, he has chosen a decision to illustrate a decision the outcome of which he already

21. Derrida has actually argued that the only decisions, "insane as it may seem," are "unconscious," which come from the other (in oneself). See Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, *op. cit.*, p. 69. It follows that the undecidable is what allows decisions even to be contemplated; that "*A theory of the subject is incapable of accounting for the slightest decision*" (p. 68), but it is difficult to see why this does not get rid of all responsibility. Moreover, when Derrida speaks of Abraham, he does so as if the latter's decision were entirely conscious. This sort of specification provides a convenient loophole for thinkers such as de Man.

22. Derrida admits as much when he says: "Such is the aporia of responsibility: one always risks not managing to accede to the concept of responsibility in the process of forming it." See Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

23. Derrida would oppose such a reading on the basis of his argument that his quasi-transcendental "program" always leaves a place for the singular other, since it involves "waiting without horizon of expectation" for an "alterity which cannot be anticipated." See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

24. Cf. Derrida's most extended meditation on decision, which appears in Chapter 3 of *The Gift of Death*, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-81.

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knows.[25] According to his own theory, one cannot decide responsibly on the basis of an outcome known in advance. How responsible is his choice of the Abraham-Isaac story in this regard? Has he not settled on it because it fits in a philosophical *program* (that of developing a theory of decision — even if the decision turns out to confound programmability)? Moreover, in doing so, has he not had recourse to that retrospection which decision does not allow? Has this not influenced his choice of example? After all, it is difficult to imagine him having chosen the example of a rapist deciding on his next victim, or a general deciding on the best strategy for executing a war crime, or, perhaps more interestingly, of any decision "for the best" which ended in disaster. Alternatively, it would have been illuminating to read an account of what made him decide to defend de Man, of how he both weighed up and took leave of the various informing contexts in that affair. Presumably, these decisions too would have to pass through the "experience of the impossible," the trial of the *perhaps*, since the latter are intrinsic to the "structure" of decision. Nor does he analyze a decision *yet to be taken*, and attempt to show how one might go about approaching that decision in terms of the specific context. No, Derrida has chosen not only an example he already knows has a "happy ending," but one which, all fear and trembling aside, constitutes a supreme example of the man of faith's obedience to God's unfathomable, seemingly terrible Law.

There was hardly any insanity about this choice: it hardly required an

25. Here Harold Bloom might point to an "anxiety of influence." Elsewhere (not least in *Specters of Marx*) Derrida has had much to say about the "structure of inheritance." It is significant, therefore, that he chooses not to refer to this when dealing with Kierkegaard. Thus, here he makes hardly any reference to Kierkegaard's other writings. In *The Gift of Death* Derrida seems to take Kierkegaard's text and its author's supposed intentions "at face value," which seems odd, given the lengths to which he has gone in the past to demonstrate why this is impossible, and the various efforts he has made to complicate the relation between author/intentional authority and the text. One might compare his treatment of Genet (in *Glas*, tr. by John P. Leavey Jr. and Richard Rand [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986]), Ponge (in *Signéponge*, tr. by Richard Rand [New York: Columbia University Press, 1984]), and Friedrich Nietzsche ("Otobiographies: The Teachings of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name," in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida*, ed. by Christie V. McDonald, tr. by Peggy Kamuf and Avital Ronell [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988]) with his treatment of Kierkegaard. Whereas he goes out of his way to dissociate Nietzsche, who was hardly reticent about claiming responsibility for his work, from some of the horrors which have become associated with his writing, he has little to say about the fact that Kierkegaard wrote *Fear and Trembling* under a pseudonym, Johannes *de silentio*, which implies that what is in the written text does not encapsulate the "intended" meaning. Has Derrida satisifed his own imperative here?

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Abrahamic leap of faith to light on this particular text.[26] It was the result not of a decision (at least, not the sort of decision taken by Abraham), but of calculation. Although Derrida frequently refers to the unavoidable risk of evil that is part and parcel of deconstruction's rethinking of notions such as decision, faith, hospitality, or the messianic, here he has selected an example almost designed to deflect attention from such a possibility. In fact, all the decisions he considers are made by those striving for the "best," trying desperately to overcome the *perhaps,* to eradicate the risks associated with it. Does this not imply that he knows *a priori* what will constitute a felicitous or a calamitous result? In which case, is there not some epistemological double-dealing going on? Why does not Derrida choose as an example the case of the SS guard who happily decides to send children to the ovens? Because such an action is programmatic, not decisive?[27] Because it is "wrong"? But how can one determine right and wrong independently of the infernal machine of decision (if one could, it would be irresponsible *not* to be programmatic)?[28] For primarily political reasons (in Heidegger's "vulgar" sense of the word),[29] deconstruction must be seen to be working for the "good" — even if this is a "good" that it must not, for its own philosophical sake, define.

Here complications ensue. On the one hand, Derrida would argue that he is carefully deconstructing potentially dangerous notions such as the "good," in the name of which evil is so often perpetrated. One of his most valuable contributions is his persistent exposure of the violence that

26. Consider Derrida's choice of a felicitous decision in relation to what he says about the conditions for "successful" performative utterances in "Signature, Event, Context" (in *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. by Alan Bass [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982], pp. 309-30), where he stresses that if it were not intrinsically susceptible to deviance, misconstrual, parody etc., a performative speech act could never be "authentic" (pp. 321-27). Whereas in the case of speech act theory Derrida emphasizes, using various "perverse" examples, the essentiality of "unsuccessful" performatives (which include lying, acting, etc.), when he speaks of decision he abandons such extravagance (even if the possibility of miscalculation remains essential to the moment of decision). His tone is more solemn and more earnest. Why should this be so, given that the same paradoxical conditions obtain in both cases?

27. On the contrary, might not such an "unthinking" action provide a good example of an unconscious decision?

28. Of course, one need not be so "controversial": daring to eat a peach would have served equally as well.

29. The term is used in its most common sense, in which the essence of the political and associated ideas remain unquestioned. Of course, Derrida attempts to question a series of such "vulgar" concepts of the political in *Specters of Marx*, reformulating them deconstructively. His own "political" strategy in doing so ("for" deconstruction) might be understood in a "vulgarly" political sense.

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underpins philosophical theories that raucously proclaim their support for the "good," for "human values," etc.[30] Yet, by merely doing so, is he not tacitly working toward that same oversimplification that he repeatedly condemns in others? Is he not claiming to be able to differentiate between approximations of a goal which, according to deconstruction, can be no more than a mirage? The problem is that Derrida cannot say so, for that would be tantamount to endorsing the sort of ethical *program* he seeks to deconstruct. Aporias and undecideabilities notwithstanding, Derrida believes some decisions to be better than others, even if, for philosophical reasons, they can never be perfectly justified, and their ultimate consequences cannot be foreseen. Moreover, these decisions are all but indistinguishable from those which would be recommended in the given circumstances. Deconstruction's relation with notions such as the "good" is far more equivocal than many of Derrida's recent pronouncements would indicate.[31] Such pronouncements constitute something of a promotional exercise, the politics behind which are not always those that can be deduced from Derrida's own analyses.

Derrida's reading of the Abraham story (which is also a gloss on Kierkegaard) focuses on the difference between ethics and a certain notion of responsibility. Ethics, for Kierkegaard at least, refers to the moral law as it governs one's interaction with one's fellows. To act ethically means to justify one's actions before the community: to show that one has acted in accordance with *general* principles — i.e., as any other would have acted in one's place. Abraham, however, does not act ethically, and no one can take his place. What he demonstrates by his "terrible" deed is that, "far from ensuring responsibility, the generality of ethics incites to irresponsibility."[32] It is easy to see how such a scenario tallies with Derrida's thinking concerning decision. Ethics here is effectively a "program" that has calculated everything in advance. One cannot *decide* to be ethical, one can only do one's *duty*, which is prescribed (in a sense, there can be no such thing as one's duty). In assuming his *singular*, *absolute* responsibility, Abraham breaks with the ethical

30. Derrida has been the victim of such (self-)righteous outbursts. See John Searle's "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Jacques Derrida," in *Glyph* I (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 198-208, and the letter appended to "*Honoris Causa*" (pp. 419-21).

31. This word is deliberately chosen. Texts such as "Force of Law," *Specters of Marx*, *op. cit.*, and *Politics of Friendship*, *op. cit.*, are punctuated by epigrammatic and eminently quotable statements concerning justice, the messianic, etc.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

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order, which becomes "a temptation."[33]

Absolute responsibility exceeds ethics, goes beyond any conceivable duty, and must entail that "experience of the impossible" that is decision.[34] Here, Derrida shockingly illustrates his notion that a decision, in order to be truly de-cisive, respects and betrays the context "in" which it is made, in a "singular" double gesture (it was this terrible, but apparently insuperable paradox — that the supreme knight of faith was also a murderer — that caused Kierkegaard his fear and trembling). His next step is much more problematic. Despite his emphasis on the singularity of every decision, and despite the specificity of the context in which Abraham's decision is made, Derrida regards the latter as a paradigm.[35]

He even uses this paradigm to challenge those "knights of good conscience" (read "Enlightenment" thinkers/opponents of deconstruction) who claim that "Philosophers who don't write ethics are failing in their duty."[36] He cannot be accused of using an "extreme" example as the basis for a general law, since if his philosophy has demonstrated anything it is that "marginal" cases are essential to the constitution of the law that marginalizes them, the "exception" is germane to the rule it undermines. But what of this *general* law? By generalizing, is Derrida not creating a decisionist *ethics*, and thereby acting irresponsibly? Unsurprisingly, he answers this question in the negative, with a paradoxical formula: *Tout autre est tout autre* ("Every other (one) is every (bit) other").[37] He describes this

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33. As Derrida summarizes: "Absolute responsibility is not a responsibility, at least it is not general responsibility or responsibility in general. It needs to be exceptional and extraordinary, and it needs to be that absolutely and par excellence: it is as if absolute responsibility could not be derived from a *concept* of responsibility . . . it must therefore be irresponsible to be absolutely responsible." *Ibid.*, p. 61. In these initial steps, Derrida can make matters sound more clear than they are. Thus, it might be asked: "By behaving ethically, have I not (effectively) decided not to decide?" Is *this* a decision? If so, is ethics, even in the Kierkegaardian sense, ever simply ethical?

34. *Ibid.*, p. 66: "In both general and abstract terms, the absoluteness of duty, or responsibility, and of obligation certainly demands that one transgress ethical duty, although in betraying it one belongs to it and at the same time recognizes it. The contradiction and the paradox must be endured in the instant itself . . . Abraham must assume absolute responsibility for sacrificing his son by sacrificing ethics, but in order for there to be a sacrifice, the ethical must retain all its value; the love for his son must remain intact, and the order of human duty must continue to insist on its rights."

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-9: "Day and night, at every instant, on all the Mount Moriahs of this world, I am . . . raising my knife over what I love and must love, over those to whom I owe absolute fidelity, incommensurably . . . [the] land of Moriah . . . is our habitat every second of every day.".

36. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-8 and 82ff.

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"hetero-tautological speculation which always risks meaning nothing" as "too elliptical," but it is essentially an attempt to "seal the contract between universality and the exception of singularity," i.e., that between ethics and responsibility, while preserving the dissymmetry of that relation.[38] In other words, decisiveness functions as a quasi-transcendental principle that regulates a series of singular events in a "general economy," and therefore joins a long list of similar terms in Derrida's work.[39]

Is this qualification sufficient? Despite Derrida's specification, does he not risk levelling all qualitative distinctions and hence rendering all decisions equally unimportant? Are turning on a tap and planting a bomb, feeding the cat (Derrida's example) and poisoning it, equally "Abrahamic"? Is Derrida intimating that one *should* approach *all* decisions as if one had knives raised over one's children?[40] If he is suggesting that the Abraham-Isaac scenario provides no more than a sort of structural template for decision, does he not risk banalizing that momentous event, divesting it of its exemplarity/singularity? Why not choose one of the decisions everyone makes every day?

Despite all qualifications and disclaimers, in trying to think the general and the particular, rule and event together, Derrida still leans toward the former, and with good reason. What if he had attempted to foreground the singularity of every decision? For quasi-transcendental reasons this is not possible. Suppose that it were. It would have meant considering concrete

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9: "What can be said about Abraham's relation to God can be said about my relation without relation to *every other (one) as every (bit) other* . . . At the instant of every decision and through the relation to *every other (one) as every (bit) other*, every one else asks us at every moment to behave like knights of faith."

39. The paradoxical relation between the general and the particular, rule and event, energizes Derrida's entire thinking. He coined the term "quasi-transcendental," which he introduced in *Glas* and explained in greater detail in "Afterword: Towards an Ethic of Discussion," in order to describe irreducibly liminal terms such as "trace," "différance," "iterability," "parergon" etc., which are not simply concepts but generate "the silhouette of ideality" (Derrida, "Afterword," *op. cit.*, p. 119).

40. As Derrida points out, if a man were to attempt to sacrifice his son today on top of Montmartre, arguing that God had told him to do so, he would most likely be consigned to a padded cell. Yet, if *tout autre est tout autre*, how could civilized society ever be justified in taking *that* decision? Derrida's commentary on this hypothetical case is most striking, precisely because it is so classically anti-bourgeois and powerfully, even naively Christian in tone. He accuses a society which would condemn a latterday Abraham of hypocrisy on the grounds that, "because of the structure of the laws of the market which that society has instituted and controls, because of the mechanisms of external debt and other similar inequities, that same society puts to death or . . . allows to die of hunger and disease tens of millions of children." *Ibid.*, p. 86. How can a man of such "moral fibre" be so feline when it comes to recommending actual decisions?

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cases. Suppose Derrida were presented with a series of cases in which decisions were pending, and asked what decision he would recommend and what steps he would take before recommending it. Presumably, he would have to refrain from doing so, as deciding would not only be impossible in every instance, but each impossibility would be unique. To advocate a particular action would be to advocate the entire *telos* presupposed by that action, and the ethical program that *telos* implied.[41] It is just such advocacy that deconstruction cannot provide, and it is therefore not surprising that in the many pages Derrida has devoted to decision and associated difficulties, not once does he recommend a particular course of action in a specific situation — even if he is all too ready to criticize others for doing so.

Yet, there is at least one other problem here. If, because of their singularity, decisions are radically incommensurable, can *anything* be learned from decisions made by others in necessarily different circumstances? If, to paraphrase Heidegger, a decision is each time one's own (or the other's in oneself), then all decisions are literally unprecedented. Would this not render Derrida's analysis of Abraham's decision irrelevant? If his reading exemplifies anything, is it not that there are no examples of the decision, because, in order to be truly de-cisive, decisions must be absolutely heterogeneous to the order of exemplarity? If this is the case, is not the implied injunction "Act as Abraham acted" at best illogical and at worst meaningless? While this seems to follow from his observations, there is little in his writing to indicate that he would accept such a conclusion.

Yet, suppose that there is a didactic aspect to his undertaking. Here, too, there are serious problems. Does such an assumption not imply, again, that a *telos* is at work here, albeit minimally, that it is worth studying the decision for a reason? Is this reason not that one aims to make better, more responsible decisions as a consequence of one's comparisons? Would this not involve recourse to that curious retrospective clairvoyance mentioned earlier? If so, one would have to conclude that, to take responsible account

41. Even Simon Critchley is moved to ask: "Derrida insists that judgements have to be made and decisions to be taken, provided it is understood that they must pass through an experience of the undecidable. But then, *what* decisions are taken, *which* judgements are made?" See *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 275. However, here the pot may be calling the kettle indecisive, since in almost 600 pages of his own work (*The Ethics of Deconstruction*, *op. cit.*, and *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity* [London: Verso, 1999]) he also fails to advocate any decisions, or to provide comparative examples of decisions either already taken or yet to be taken — despite insisting with unremitting earnestness that deconstruction is more ethical than anything that has previously passed off as ethics, more potentially democratic than any actual democracy.

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of decisions, one *always* does so in relation to an *ethical* horizon. Each time one adds to one's knowledge in light of earlier decisions, one seeks to reduce the hazards associated with it and thereby renders the process of decision-making more and more formulaic, more *programmatic*. But, according to Derrida's own stipulations, would not this "cumulative" approach be *ipso facto irresponsible*?[42] This can be illustrated with the example of his reading of Kierkegaard's reading of the Old Testament story in *The Gift of Death*. The example is relevant in light of Derrida's employment of this procedure (considering how a text "internally" exemplifies, reflects, or undermines the process it aims to elucidate from "without").

Was not Abraham fortunate that he did not read Derrida's commentary before taking Isaac to Mount Moriah, since his *unawareness* of the nature of his decision (as Derrida understands it) allowed him to take it? Was it not his *ignorance* of the notion of absolute responsibility that allowed him to act responsibly? Knowledge of absolute responsibility could only have rendered him less responsible, since to be aware of it and yet not to attempt to emulate it would be "irresponsible" (in the "classical" sense). Yet, to make absolute responsibility one's goal would instantly diminish one's capacity to respond responsibly, because absolute responsibility would now be functioning as a minimal *ethical* norm, and ethical orientation is irresponsible. Consequently, by invoking Abraham as an example, does Derrida not automatically render his readers less capable of deciding, precisely because when making a decision one cannot but do so in relation to this exorbitant example? By providing a case study of absolute responsibility, by exemplifying the unexemplifiable, does not Derrida prevent or inhibit one from acceding to it? Does this not make his entire project of rethinking responsibility *irresponsible*?

Of course, Derrida could parry the preceding argument simply by reiterating that in decision singularity and generality are inextricably confused. To consider it from either extreme is to miss his point, or perhaps to confirm it. To illustrate it more forcefully: decisions are "impossible," so how can one be accused of unintentionally rendering the impossible more or less possible? He might even add that his use of the Abraham-Isaac

42. A classic example would be Derrida's "Parergon," in *The Truth in Painting*, tr. by Geoffrey Bennington and Ian Macleod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 16-147, in which he considers Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. While Derrida granted many of his earlier texts such as (to cite just two examples) "Tympan" (*Margins of Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, pp. x-xxix) and *Glas*, *op. cit.*, a powerful performative dimension (such that they effectively enacted deconstruction), his more recent writings on ethics and politics are far more classically constative, as if his referents were somehow more stable.

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story is responsible because, by making one aware of one's answerability to the "impossible," it calls for ever greater levels of responsibility. After all, is not Derrida's notion of responsibility always and endlessly excessive? Is it not the case that responsibility, like infinity, never decreases, however comprehensively one tries to quantify it?

Ethics and/as Impotence

The responsibility described by Derrida exceeds what was required of Abraham. At least the two of them could rely on God as ultimate legislator, however "terrible," "unethical" and *apparently* exorbitant the demands may have been.[43] Has not "God" always already assured that decisions such as Abraham's are not as decisive as they may seem? He has always already irresponsibilized all decisions (however repugnant and scandalous they may be) which will have been taken in His name, because they will have been taken in accordance with His Law.[44] To put it crudely, what is fearful responsibility for mortals must be something like ethics for Him. If, for Kierkegaard, Abraham walks an ethical tightrope, Derrida removes the safety-net — that of God as the final guarantor of "responsibility" and its seemingly impossible stakes.[45] It is Derrida's version of responsibility that will induce fear and trembling, because it dispenses with all guarantees and will always be inadequate.[46] In order to be what it is, it *must* never meet even with the paradoxical retribution Abraham receives, since it produces an absolute disequilibrium in the economy of

43. It might be argued that the truly faithful is incapable of any decision, since true faith precludes the radical doubt required for a decision to be decisive. In "Faith and Knowledge" and *Monolingualism of the Other*, however, Derrida has reiterated that faith as such is not possible without doubt, which becomes one of its positive conditions.

44. Here Derrida's account of why Abraham's decision is "successful" seems deficient. He argues that "in the imminence that doesn't even separate the decision from the act, God returns his son to him and decides by sovereign decision [?], by an absolute gift, to reinscribe sacrifice within an economy by means of what thenceforth comes to resemble a reward" (*The Gift of Death*, *op. cit.*, p. 96). Perhaps such language cannot be avoided, but the notion that God Himself makes a decision, even one which involves a "no-time-lapse" seems naive. For a divine mind, would not the entire game have been played out on the eve of its commencement — an infinitely ancient eve?

45. The early works support the assumption that Derrida does not believe in God, even though he has taken to invoking Him in many recent texts, and discussing Him as if His Laws, as they have been elucidated throughout the ages, were somehow operative. Yet, he has never declared himself an atheist.

46. There is a clear echo of Levinas here, since for Levinas ethics begins with a sort of *Ur*-encounter with the Other, which makes demands one can never meet. For his most extensive exposition of the ethical encounter, see *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, tr. by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1981).

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exchange and remuneration, an absolute and absolutely necessary imbalance on the scales of "justice."[47] Alongside Derridean responsibility, even Kant's "categorical imperative" seems like a walk in the park, since Kant believed in it as an absolute measure of moral behavior — even if mortals are all but doomed to fall short of its demand. Not even "God" could accede to absolute responsibility, which becomes the most extreme imaginable form of surplus value — or surplus as value.

In other words, Derrida questions previous ethics, not because they are unethical, but because they are not *sufficiently* ethical. This claim has become a constant in his work. In *Counterfeit Money*, his most involved meditation on the gift, no act of giving that is aware of itself *as* an act of giving can be truly generous, because it is pre-inscribed within an economy of exchange and repayment. True giving would be giving without expectation of return, but, like a decision, such a donation would have to be entirely unconscious, and hence would not constitute a donation at all. Equally, when Derrida talks of hospitality, he imagines that somehow it respects the absolute alterity of the stranger, which in no way "reterritorializes" him. Paradoxically, in order to do so, such hospitality has to await the stranger in his absolute unexpectedness.[48] Again, in order to be hospitable, one must be the perfect host but remain unaware of it, for otherwise one would have "economized" the otherness of the other within a predetermined "horizon of expectation."[49] For Derrida, responsibility, generosity, and hospitality are all aporetic, and they are so in structurally homologous, perhaps identical ways. The problems associated with responsibility arise in relation to the other two.

What is happening here? On the one hand, all the concepts Derrida considers under the broad umbrella of ethics are truly Judeo-Christian, and in deducing "general economies" of decision, donation, and welcome he continues to grant those economies a quasi-transcendental (i.e., quasi-Kantian) "priority" that effectively subsumes any notions of responsibility, generosity, and hospitality developed in other cultures which might claim to differ fundamentally from those of Judeo-Christianity. He is claiming that it is impossible to imagine these concepts in ways other than those generated by the various "economies" outlined above, even if the

47. For Derrida, there can be no justice without originary imbalance, disadjustment or disjuncture, which "is" (the very the possibility of) one's asymmetrical and anachronous relation to the other. This "out-of-jointness" he analyses in *Specters of Marx*, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-31.

48. See, e.g., Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, *op. cit.*, pp. 65 and 168-70.

49. Derrida underscores the etymology of the word "economy" (*oikos* — home; *nomos* — law) in *Counterfeit Money*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

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latter can never determine precisely what empirical events these concepts will generate (*Tout autre est tout autre*). Again, a number of questions suggest themselves. Despite his unconditional invitation to the "wholly other," can Derrida avoid the charge of a rarified ethnocentrism? From a more conventionally political viewpoint, to what extent is such an invitation an abreaction to the ways in which the Christian attitude toward the neighbor has been so flagrantly abused by the West, not least when it has been invoked to justify "benign" forms of colonialism? By rendering hospitality "impossible," Derrida at least exposes such ruses for what they are. More interestingly, to what extent are Derrida's hyperbolized versions of responsibility, generosity, and hospitality already implicit in these notions as they have been developed by Judeo-Christianity? To what extent are they merely extrapolations?

Derrida has gone to great pains to demonstrate why terms such as "trace," "différance," "pharmakon," etc. cannot be accounted for or absorbed within Western metaphysics. Yet, his explanations are based more on logic than on ethics. If anything, such terms, and Derrida's highly nuanced descriptions of them, resemble undecidable propositions as formalized by Kurt Gödel.[50] The latter, of course, are value-free. Yet, can one do for general, imprecisely defined and subjectively and socially charged notions such as deciding, giving, or welcoming what one seems to be able to do with words such as "hymen" in the works of Mallarmé or "parergon" in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*?[51] In the latter case, the double gesture of belonging and non-belonging can be determined more accurately and with less risk of falling back within the conceptual tenets of the system under deconstruction. In the former, Derrida seems only to have pushed Judeo-Christian ethics to a limit which that ethics already implied — he has merely taken God (in so far as He would be that absolute authority which eliminates all undecidability) out of the equation.

Such a rethinking of ethics in the absence of all transcendent guarantees is hardly new. What is more disconcerting is the different double gesture, at

50. Derrida invites a comparison between Gödel's project and his own, in "The Double Session," in *Dissemination*, tr. by Barbara Johnson (London: Althone, 1993), p. 219. For an introduction to Gödel's work and its profound significance, see Ernest Nagel and James R. Newman, *Gödel's Proof* (London: Routledge, 1958).

51. Derrida is again very close to Gödel, at least in spirit, when he says, "What has always interested me the most . . . is . . . the strictest possible determination of the figures of play, of oscillation, of undecideability." See "Afterword . . ." *op. cit.*, p. 145. The question remains one of rigor and accuracy: can Derrida do for concepts as hazy as decision what Gödel did for mathematics? He speaks of decision as if he has axiomatized it in its non-axiomatizability, but there is obviously room for doubt.

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once radical and hyper-conservative, through which Derrida makes the transition, with one and the same stroke removing the very basis for Judeo-Christian ethics and forcing that ethics to its "impossible" (de)limit(ation). In doing so, he all but reverses the words of Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor — without God, *nothing* is permitted, since every considered action assumes an ultimately groundless and unjustifiable *telos*. As a result, most of his work on ethics share a number of features: those who promote ethics are subject to deconstruction; this deconstruction gives rise to paradoxical formulae which make deconstruction appear more ethical than the criticized program; deconstruction is then linked to those same, often utopian ideals (democracy, justice, internationalism, fraternity) that the program under consideration had formulated too clumsily or narrowly.

Because it cannot endorse any particular set of policies through which those now impossible ideals might be approached, deconstruction cannot be linked to those ideals.[52] Politically speaking, here its impotence is also its greatest asset, allowing deconstruction, in the name of ethics, politics, and democracy, to criticize and dismember actual manifestations of the ethical, the political and the democratic, without having to commit itself to any alternative models of its own.[53] This is an oversimplification. Derrida would claim that deconstruction's "inability" to produce a "politics" is its greatest political weapon, since by rethinking such apparently obvious notions as decision and responsibility, by eking out the irresolvable contradictions they conceal, he is transforming what is known as politics. Rather than making another move in the game, deconstruction is altering the rules.[54] This is certainly the case with his notion of an unattainable

52. Derrida's criticisms are often relevant (see, e.g., his comments on Fukuyama in *Specters of Marx*, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-75, or his response to critics in "*Honoris Causa*"), but they are almost always based on a recognizably liberal and suggestively left-wing (even Christian) agenda he is powerless to advocate in any concrete form. See, e.g., his attack on bourgeois hypocrisy in *The Gift of Death*, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-6.

53. Derrida does make one unambiguous recommendation: *that all these discourses be deconstructed.* On what basis has he *decided* this? Since allegedly deconstruction is always already underway, regardless of the subject's conscious intervention (which deconstruction renders possible), how can he recommend that a system *be* deconstructed at all? Indeed, how can he use "deconstruct" as a transitive verb (which he frequently does)?

54. As Bennington argues, Derrida "stands a chance of proposing something radical about the political just to the extent that his texts do not answer to [the] demand [that he produce a coherent political theory]" See "Derrida and Politics," *op. cit.*, p. 24. Bennington also makes the almost Deleuzian point that Derrida is working on an endlessly intricate and delicate epistemological micro-level more fundamental than that of crude socio-political macrostructures which "reterritorialize" these intricacies while remaining dependent on them. An analytic philosopher might ask, "How does he know this to be the case?"

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"democracy to come" — an impossible virtuality or futurity, which exerts a pressure on all actual political thought and institutions.

In emphasizing the profound effect of impossibilities and unrealizable virtualities on all political thought that is always deemed too crude, reductive, or exclusionary, deconstruction runs the risk of appearing either as a critical Puritanism or as a series of empty, if largely unobjectionable platitudes.[55] It also risks falling into the same contradictions it exploits everywhere. Consider Bennington's exposition of Derrida's extension of Levinas' thinking of the ethical, in which the former attempts to demonstrate that "ethics is essentially *pervertible*, and . . . this pervertibility is the positive condition of all the positive values (the Good, the Just, and so on) which ethics enjoins us to seek."[56] Derrida's point is the same one he makes about decision — it is possible to act ethically if one can never be sure about doing it, if one does not expose oneself to the risk of absolute evil when choosing the good. Otherwise, ethics would be no more than "an administrative or bureaucratic application of cognitive rules."[57] Despite its deprioritization, he always assumes that one ought to choose the good, whatever this might be.

The supposed (hyper-ethical) radicalization here consists in the quasi-transcendental or perhaps micrological reformulation of the very possibility of the ethical, which, Derrida would argue, must affect what has previously been considered the ethical domain — a domain in which good and evil have traditionally been assumed to be separate and opposed forces. For Bennington: "This affirmation of pervertibility as a positive condition of what appeared to be opposed to it . . . does not of course commit one to welcoming *actual* perversions of ethical values."[58] Does this follow from the initial premise? How can one speak unequivocally of "*actual* perversions" if a constitutive and irreducible equivocation is what allows one to choose responsibly? Is not Bennington assuming the very thing that can no longer be assumed — the basic *a priori* ethical distinction between good

55. A common Derridian tactic consists of upbraiding those who reject his interminable critique as impractical or pointless for being "obscurantist" or "dogmatic," precisely when they claim to be upholding Enlightenment values. He would object on the same grounds if one were to claim that, in its infinitization of critique, deconstruction is an Enlightenment gone mad. In fact, Derrida does not dissociate deconstruction from a certain Enlightenment.

56. Derrida, "Deconstruction and Ethics," in *Interrupting Derrida*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

57. *Ibid*, p. 43. Ethics and decision, so clearly demarcated in Derrida's reading of Kierkegaard, become all but indistinguishable in his reading of Levinas. Although he insists on preserving their difference, in many of his "ethical" writings "responsibility," "ethics," "hospitality," "justice" and "democracy to come" seem virtually interchangeable.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

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and evil, the very foundations of which have just been exploded? If one can recognize an "*actual* perversion" of ethics, is not that premise, ethically speaking, irrelevant? Once more, the unsustainable contradictions that result from the deconstructive tensions between virtuality and actuality, teleology and ateleology, the "to come" and the "has arrived," seem to have supervened.[59] What remains is an immiscible combination of an entirely conventional ethics (*of course*, one can discriminate between good and evil) and a discourse which claims to have revolutionized it.

Bennington concedes that the specifically *quasi*-transcendental character of this condition of the ethical "means that, as always in deconstructive thought, it is impossible to rigorously separate the transcendental from the factical or the empirical, and this entails that, uncomfortably, I cannot use the transcendental aspect of the analysis to provide *a priori* knowledge of which empirical cases, which events arriving, in fact constitute acts of perversion or perversity."[60] Why "uncomfortably," if this is a condition that cannot be avoided? Is it because Bennington suspects that deconstruction is veering toward the *unethical*, since ethics tends to be less susceptible to these doubts than the formulation would indicate, and there would be certain potential courses of action which ought to be supported (courses of action which deconstruction would no doubt applaud *after the fact*)? Or, is there a more philosophical discomfort involved, in that Derrida is claiming that what makes ethics in *general* possible also makes all *particular* ethical recommendations impossible (except from the safety of hindsight — but then one is not judging responsibly)?

This apparent disjunction may be compared to a similar impasse in quantum physics — that of "decoherence."[61] The quantum world is a ghostly one of virtuality and probability, in which entities have "tendencies to exist" and events "tendencies to occur." It "is" not. Decoherence describes the problematic transition from quantum imminence to physical actuality, from generality (the probabilistic) to particularity (the empirical). It relates to the still not fully understood way in which a vast series of potential quantum figurations "decohere" into something like a glass or a human being. It is not possible to "deduce" the latter macro-scale phenomena

59. Here, the word "contradictions" is used instead of "aporias," because the latter are supposedly arrived at logically, whereas the former result from a breakdown or an unjustified contravention of logic.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

61. For a brief, but lucid summary of decoherence, see John Gribbin's *Q is for Quantum: Particle Physics from A-Z* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1998), p. 101.

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from the former micro-scale activities and hence, dealing with glasses or human beings, quantum factors play no role. One can see a clear parallel here with Derrida's "impossible" transition from the imminent decision (an unlimited and incalculable series of possibilities) and the decision actually made (leaving a determinate set of consequences). However, whereas quantum mechanics would stress, at least in practical terms, a certain disconnection between the two states, Derrida emphasizes the importance of the former with respect to the latter. He would either be a world without glasses or one in which one could never decide to have a drink. Indeed, he must constantly be amazed that anything at all happens. To use another analogy, it is as if Derrida were treating the rules of chess as if they were a move within the game. Or, more accurately, it is as if he were trying to take into account all possible plays on a chessboard without fixed borders or fixed rules, and claiming this infinitely patient surveillance as the best tactic. Of course, he would lose on time without making a move.[62]

Once again, it is easy to imagine a possible riposte. Derrida might agree that deconstruction effects something like a regulated de-regulation of the rules, and hence is "responsible" for what moves are possible. However, has he not *decided* that this de-regulation of decision is a necessary and important *move*? Has he not done so for reasons this de-regulation could never ground? Again, Derrida might say "yes," since rule and event, code and operation are no longer independently determinable. Moreover, since this de-regulation always involves a formal de-totalization, both he and his supporters have tended to advertise deconstruction as a generalized anti-authoritarianism. But is a general proof that totalization of whatever stripe is impossible,[63] and hence always phantasmatic, equivalent to taking an ethical anti-totalitarian stance? Are actual dictators,

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62. Derrida uses the metaphor of the chessboard in "Différance" in *Margins of Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-27. Referring to différantial delimitation, he claims "There is no maintaining, and no depth to, this bottomless chessboard in which Being is put into play." Here, however, his point is strictly formal.

63. A good example of this dilemma occurs in *Monolingualism of the Other,* where Derrida discusses colonial hegemony and linguistic domination/suppression under French rule in Algeria. Although he is clearly opposed to colonial aggression (for presumaby straightforwardly "humanist" reasons), he can only express this opposition through a formal proof that this hegemony is always phantasmatic, since it is fundamentally dependent on différantial "relays of metalanguage 'within' a language" (as well as across different languages) (p. 22; see also 23ff.). Such a proof (if there can be proofs in such a necessarily ill-defined domain) seems to have no bearing on violence and hegemony as these actually occur, and yet Derrida must refrain from advocating any particular program of resistance lest he contradict the basic premises of his argument.

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multinationals, etc. likely to be perturbed by the fact that deconstruction has formally demonstrated that their drive toward hegemony will always already have been compromised by *différance*?

Once more, this leads to the conflict between the general and the specific, the virtual and the actual, and once more deconstruction has mistakenly argued that the formulation of the most general laws and logics of ethics and responsibility (and deconstruction always produces general laws) is an act as ethical and responsible as any of the particular acts which those same laws and logics make possible.[64] It is as if Einstein's theory of general relativity, which explains how and if one can throw a stone in any part of the universe (and which is very close to deconstruction, as Derrida claims) were ethically relevant to throwing that stone into a stream or at another person.[65] Similarly, it is as if being an architect and understanding the principles of contruction counted as much if not more than choosing to design/build a death camp rather than a hospital. Once more, it would not be difficult to guess at Derrida's objections to such arguments.

Obviously, Derrida thinks that, despite its constitutional irresolution, deconstruction is or should be working for "the good." He continues to announce this in ever more forceful ways, and to take issue with those who would deny deconstruction's political potency in what are often wholly conventional terms — terms which always imply the unquestioning

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64. In "X" (*Interrupting Derrida*, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-92), Bennington attempts to show that, for philosophical reasons, Derrida cannot but be "applied," i.e., involved from the first (and hence prior to any arguments about how deconstruction has been or ought to be applied) in ethical and political questions. Since, as Derrida has claimed, experience in general would not be possible if it were not always already under deconstruction, such a conclusion is inevitable. However, it is so hyperbolically general ("deconstruction is at work always and everywhere") as to risk appearing meaningless, or at least unhelpful. Thus, when Bennington speaks of deconstruction "liberat[ing] *a sort of energy* in the metaphysical concept of politics" and of "the generalized 'politics' that deconstruction *just is*" in "Derrida and Politics," *op. cit.*, p. 24 [emphasis added]), the inexactitude of the language follows from what Derrida says about the political and yet it is so vague as to risk being dismissed as meaningless. Again, it is rather like claiming that the Second Law of Thermodynamics is always already employed and that such a fundamental statement is more important than the actual ways in which one conserves and expends energy. It is symptomatic that at the end of this chapter, Bennington, in the light of his previous comments, refers to "responsibilities" which "must nonetheless be taken" without saying what these responsibilities are or whence they are derived. Again, the transformation of the potential to the actual, from law to event, is both proclaimed necessary and left unexplained.

65. For Derrida's interpretation of the significance of Einsteinian relativity, see the discussion "Structure, Sign and Play," reprinted in *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. by Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1970), pp. 247-72.

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assumption of the sort of ethical principles his own disquisitions on ethics, strictly speaking, will not allow him to assume.[66] Yet, because deconstruction stresses the ineluctability of such "contraventions," it acquires, at least in principle, a sort of infinitely extendable immunity to (self-)contradiction and a correspondingly augmented capacity for critique. Nevertheless, not all contradictions are equally contradictory. There is a difference between the formal aporia associated with terms such as "différance," "trace," or "supplement" and simple inconsistency. Although Derrida has stressed from the first that "deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work," this structural paradox is far more convincing in its strictly logical form than its necessarily more diffuse ethico-political guise.[67] Not only are some of his deconstructive readings both logically and ethically debatable, but, above and beyond them, Derrida always seems to be supporting what might be described, to borrow his own terminology, a particularly "monstrous" version of Judeo-Christianity. It is so "monstrous" that he can neither advocate nor justify a single decision taken in its name — even the decision to study the decision. At every juncture it risks appearing either as substanceless cant or a new moral absolutism. Moreover, there is an exasperating political and academic agenda at work here, and it is one which does not necessarily follow from much of

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66. In "Afterword," *op. cit.*, p. 122, Derrida concedes that the deconstructive conditions for ethics "may be unethical with respect to any given ethics" but goes on to argue that they "can . . . open up or recall the opening of another ethics, another right, another "declaration of rights," transformation of constitutions etc." Inevitably, he does not say what this "other ethics" is, or describe how rights might be altered or constitutions transformed. Thus, his statement both illustrates and compounds the problem. Something similar occurs in *Monolingualism of the Other*, *op. cit.*, p. 58. After elucidating a general law which supposedly accounts for one's (necessary and enabling) exile ("originary 'alienation'") from language, a law which he describes as a "universal structure," he goes on to say that this must not lead to "a kind of neutralization of differences" or the "misrecognition of determinate expropriations," since "it does not follow that all exiles are equivalent." Once more, he merely states this, and suggests no criteria to evaluate the specific differences between such determinate cases. This is because any such criteria cannot be deduced from the general conditions of possibility he identifies. They, and the judgments to which they give rise, are of an entirely other order.

67. Indeed, it is worth noting that, since Derrida has started explicitly to examine ethics and politics, his own writing has become noticeably more diffuse, less organized and referentially dense. See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, *op. cit.*, p. 24. Bennington has argued that there is no difference, and that what Derrida is now doing explicitly with regard to ethics and politics, he was already doing implicitly in his elaboration of quasi-transcendentals such as the trace of *différance*. See "Deconstruction and Politics," *op. cit.*, p. 28. This invites even more questions about the relative force of the implicit and the explicit, potentiality and actualization, and the possible superfluousness of the latter with regard to the former.

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the philosophizing to which it is supposedly related.

However, as with all of Derrida's philosophical undertakings which, if scrutinized closely enough, often seem, at least in terms of their conclusions, astonishingly banal, even reductive, there is undeniably something madly grandiose about it. In his revision of ethics, he not only attempts to take into account and deconstruct the entire extant corpus of ethics and its most basic and enduring assumptions, but takes as his own "impossible" premises, the most ancient "perhaps" which, in a *différantial* sense, encompasses the future in its irreducible unforseeability, its arrival, which is always "to come." That he always does so tacitly in the name of a "good," which, for essential reasons, that premise will permit him neither to assume nor to define, constitutes an inconsistency rather than a deconstructive paradox. Perhaps no one has identified the distinctly unphilosophical source of this inconsistency as clearly as Richard Rorty, who accuses Derrida of being simply one more utopian thinker, albeit one who seems to wear an all but foolproof disguise. This is at once perceptive and a little unfair. Unlike most utopian thinkers who want to "make the world a better place," Derrida wishes to formalize the proposition that it should be so.[68] This, as he might say, is not nothing. But is it enough?

68. There is a clear correspondence between this wish to formalize the messianic (as *messianicity*), the infinitely ancient and forever postponed "to come," and Derrida's earlier formalization of *restance* — that irrecoverable disseminatory excess within signification, those "cinders" of meaning which for so long had gone under the name of the "poetic," the "ineffable," the "unsayable" etc. Given the sort of dynamics which they involve, the two might be seen as one and the same. In both cases, Derrida's thought might be considered *hyper-rational* (rather than irrational, as it has so often been accused of being), in that it strives to account philosophically for phenomena which his "enlightnened" opponents might sloppily consider to be "beyond" philosophy. One feels admiration for Derrida in undertaking such a "mad" project, but not a little queasiness at the thought of what the ultimate (and curiously positivisitic — although he would vehemently deny this) implications of that project might be.

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Simmel's and Lacan's Ethics of the Exception

Amos Morris-Reich

"Your money or your life?" This unfriendly question posed by English robbers in the Middle Ages was rhetorical. The robbers were not interested in the answer, but rather in the money. But Georg Simmel and Jacques Lacan would have been, since money and life concerns the relation between the rule and its possible exception. Both pose the robbers' question in their work, and both unequivocally choose life. Yet, their answers are contradictory, not only because they have a different understanding of "money," but because they call for opposite ethical ways to deal with the exception. Each chooses life without money. But what would life be without money? For Simmel, it is spontaneous, unmediated, non-objectified existence; whereas for Lacan it is bare life, lacking full enjoyment — even a certain sense of being.

I

According to Kant, one should act only according to that maxim whereby one can "at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[1] Furthermore, "if every object of the will is abstracted "from a law, there is nothing left but the simple form of a universal legislation."[2] Thus, to speak of a rule that has an exception means to be already outside the

1. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hacket, 1981), p. 30.

2. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, tr. by Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 27. See also p. 35. Kant's ethics is characterized by its formal criterion. It does not specify an object, but occupies itself with the form of the action and the principle from which it follows. In the preface to *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant denies that he is proposing a new principle of morality, and insists that it is "only a new formula." See also Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, *op. cit.*, p. 416, and the preface to *Critique of Practical Reason*.

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framework of Kantian ethics.[3] Simmel and Lacan come after the collapse of Kantian ethics, and may be seen as two alternative ethics of the exception.[4] Kant, and later, 19th-century natural science, formulated rules as universal. Thus, a rule with exceptions is an oxymoron. All that is needed to invalidate it is an exception. However, this Kantian understanding collapsed *synchronically* in different realms, which historically culminated with the break of WWI. Different alternatives concerning the exception to the rule could appear only after this collapse. At that point, the exception to the rule is bound to the rule. Exceptions are instituted by the rule as its exceptions; as exceptions, they are subject to the rule. Only later is the

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3. See Jacques Lacan, "Kant avec Sade," in *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 765-790; and Jacques-Alain Miller, "A Discussion of Lacan's 'Kant with Sade'," in Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus, eds., *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 212-237.

4. Both Simmel and Lacan deal with general rules that have an exception. Their respective accounts provide directions *as to what to do with this exception* — an aspect that transcends ontology and generates a theory of decision-making, i.e., a rule of conduct, or ethics. As the decision over what to do with the exception is at the core of their rules of conduct, the result is two contrary ethics of the exception. This should be differentiated from related issues that in other contexts interface normality-abnormality. See Wolf Lepenies, "Normalität und Anormalität. Wechselwirkungen zwishen den Wissenschaften vom Leben und den Sozialwissenschaften im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Geschichte der Soziologie: Studien zur kognitiven, sozialen und historischen Identität einer Disziplin*, ed. by Wolf Lepenies (Frankfurt a\M: Suhrkamp, 1981), pp. 227-251; and Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (New York: Zane Books, 1993). On Foucault's account of how normalizing processes produce their own exceptions, see Mika Ojakangas, "Sovereign and Plebs: Michel Foucault Meets Carl Schmitt," in *Telos* 119 (Spring 2001), pp. 128-140; and Richard Wolin, "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism," in *Telos* 67 (Spring 1986), pp. 71-86. See also Pierre Macherey, "Für eine Naturgeschichte der Normen," in *Spiele der Wahrheit. Michel Foucaults Denken*, ed. by François Ewald and Bernhard Waldenfels (Frankfurt a\M: Suhrkamp, 1991), pp. 171-192; and Thomas L. Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996). On the undead zone of indistinction between life and death, see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, tr. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), and Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2001). On the exception as an aesthetic paradigm, see Christoph Schmidt, "Logik der Ausnahme: Zum Ästhetischen Subtext der Politischen Theologie von Carl Schmitt," in *Zeitschrift für asthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, Vol.41, No. 2 (1996), pp. 259-279. On the theological dimensions of the exception, see Giorgio Agamben, "The Messiah and the Sovereign: The Problem of Law in Walter Benjamin," in Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 160-174. On the aporia of the underivability of the law, see Jacques Derrida, "Before the Law," tr. by Avita Ronell and Christine Roulston, in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), and Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

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rule-exception relation ruled out in its entirety.[5]

Both Simmel's and Lacan's theories constitute general rules that have an exception. However, they do not remain theories but issue commands as to what to do with the exception — an aspect that transcends ontology to a theory of decision-making, i.e., a rule of conduct or ethics. As the decision over the exception is at the core of their rules of conduct, they yield two contrary ethics of the exception. In Lacan's terms, a rule with an exception obtains within a totalizable field, i.e., the sphere of the Phalic. Simmel and Lacan represent two attempts to theorize this Phalic sphere, but, separated by two generations, they do not share the same starting point. Whereas Simmel moves from a universal rule to reach the exception, Lacan takes Simmel's conclusion as his starting point.[6] Simmel died before Lacan's time, so the latter could not have influenced the former.[7] For its part, Lacan

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5. See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, *op. cit.*, p. 17. On the turn of 19th-century science's impasse concerning the law-defying individual\exceptional, see Christoph Schmidt, *Der häretische Imperative: Überlegungen zur theologischen Dialektik der Kulturwissenschaft in Deutschland* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000), in particular, pp. 11-88. Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology* (1922) is the theorization *par-excellence* of the exception to the rule in relation to political thought. Simmel and Lacan illustrate two post-Kantian epistemologies and their ethical consequences on the individual level — considerations that can hardly be said to have occupied Schmitt. Yet, Schmitt seems to fall on the side of Simmel (and Leo Strauss on the side of Lacan). See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, tr. by George Schwab (Cambridge, MA: 1985). For comparisons of Schmitt and Foucault, see Ojakangas, "Sovereign and Plebs," *op. cit.*, and Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, *op. cit.* See also Norbert Bolz, *Auszug aus der entzauberten Welt: Philosophischer Extremismus zwischen den Weltkriegen* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1991).

6. Lacan formulates two alternative strategies to deal with the exception. The following focuses on the earlier alternative, which is still in the sphere of the Phalic. The later alternative (starting from the 'Twentieth Seminar") transcends the Phalic sphere altogether, toward what Lacan designates as feminine. See Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972-1973* (New York: Norton, 1998), pp. 3-6.

7. However, an indirect historical line might be traced from Simmel to Lacan: from Simmel to Jaspers and Heidegger in Germany, and from Jaspers and Heidegger to Kojève, Sartre, and possibly Lacan in France. For Simmel's influence on Jaspers, see Hannoch Tennen, "Georg Simmel und Karl Jaspers — ein Vergleich," in *Ästhetik und Soziologie um die Jahrhunderwende: Georg Simmel*, ed. by Hannes Böhringer and Kalfried Gründer (Frankfurt a\M: Vitorio Klostermann, 1976), pp. 135-174. For Simmel's influence on the early Heidegger, see Michael Großheim, *Von Georg Simmel zu Martin Heidegger: Philosophie zwischen Leben und Existenz* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1991), and Hans-Jürgen Gawoll, "Impulse der Lebensphilosophie. Anmerkungen zum Verhältnis von Heidegger und Simmel," in *Simmel Newsletter*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Winter 1993), pp. 139-151. For Heidegger's influence on Lacan, and Kojève's role in it, see Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan: The Absolute Master*, tr. by Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 14-17. For Lacan's appropriation of existentialism, particularly Heidegger's and Jaspers' brand, see Miller, "An Introduction to Seminars I and II," in *Reading Seminars I and II. . .*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7 and 10.

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mentioned Simmel's name only once, after having heard a presentation from one of his students. Thus, what matters here is not the historical, but the theoretical proximity between them.[8] This comparison is particularly instructive because, despite this proximity, each was led to completely different ethical conclusions.[9] Both Simmel and Lacan found their own early thought unsatisfactory — even erroneous — and in their pursuit of a stronger theoretical stance were forced to supersede their own views. In terms of the relation between money and life, Simmel superseded his own account to arrive at an existential philosophy of life; while Lacan superseded existentialism to arrive at a peculiar form of structuralism.

II

Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* (1900) demonstrates how money is gradually transformed from matter to function, substance to symbol.[10] At first, money was simply something that provided a scale for transactions — a means for calculating values. It had no other purpose.[11] In the course of its evolution, money increasingly became and end, rather than a means. It began to comply with its own "objective" rule, and acquired its own "life." This objectified life even created new social forms. The individual was subdued to this objectified way of life.

Over time, in different works and contexts, Simmel perfected his understanding of objects originally created for limited purposes (he would say, for "life") that ultimately acquired a life of their own.[12] As the strongest and most obvious instance of such an objectified life, money was its paradigm. As he describes them, the effects money has on modern life are greater and more diverse than alienation.[13] Money also has positive effects.

8. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, tr. by Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), p. 158.

9. Laclau has argued that theoretical problems are never "solved," but "superseded." If problems can be solved within existing theory, then they are not "theoretical," but local. See Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: New Left Books, 1977), pp. 60-61.

10. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, tr. by Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 131-198.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

12. Cf. Georg Simmel, "The Conflict in Modern Culture" and "On the Concept and the Tragedy of Culture," tr. by K. Peter Etzkorn, in K. Peter Etzkorn, ed., *Georg Simmel: The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968), pp. 11-26 and 27-46.

13. See Birgitta Nedelmann, "Geld und Lebensstil: Georg Simmel — ein Entfremdungstheoretiker?" in *Georg Simmels Philosophie des Geldes*, ed. by Jeff Kintzele and Peter Schneider (Frankfurt a\M: Hain, 1993), p. 399.

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It increases the tempo of life, shortens some distances and lengthens others, brings people closer to the objects of their desire, and brings together people who could never come together otherwise. For good and ill, money is a strong agent of modernity. Thus, Simmel's answer to the robbers' question is unambiguous: Money holds the upper hand over subjective life. The price of this upper hand is that money interferes with life.

After the publication of *The Philosophy of Money,* Simmel was still engaged with the question of the objectification of life. His later work remained consistent with what he had written earlier.[14] In the dialectic between life and form, life becomes an objectified form. This form then persists, and brings into being new contents and new forms. No life can remain unmediated. Simmel searched for a way out of this "inherent tragedy of culture," yet he always returned to the conclusion that there is no way out. The robber's question is posed by daily life, and decided for money. Life is overpowered by money, and gives way to objectified form. Simmel's approach to the "philosophy of life" may well be seen as an attempt to deal with his "philosophy of money."

Simmel's last major work, his view of life, as well as some of his wartime writings, can be seen as his most systematic attempt to challenge the reign of objectified form over unmediated life. Given that money is the "third," which serves to measure and attach value to different objects, and which levels everything it comes in contact with, Simmel was searching for the something not measurable by money, and thus not exchangeable. He found it in "life." His development of the notion of "life" into a "philosophy of life" makes little sense were it not an attempt to deal with his own "philosophy of money."[15] Simmel raises life to the status of a constant metaphysical principle, and in so doing sublimates it.[16]

Not accidentally, Simmel (as well as others) dealt with the sublimation of life during WWI. Increasingly, Simmel spoke of life in terms of death. Life is what is destined to die, and real life may be measured only in relation to death — which is not external to the living being, but at its very core. In relation to his earlier philosophy, what is crucial for Simmel is the non-exchangeability of life. No one can die another's death;

14. Georg Simmel, "Lebensanschauung," in *Der Krieg und die geistigen Entscheidungen, Grundfragen der Soziologie: Vom Wesen des historischen Verstehens, Der Konflikt der moderner Kultur Lebensanschauung* (Frankfurt a\M: Suhrkamp, 1999), pp. 212-235.

15. See Hans Blumenberg, "Geld oder Leben: Eine metaphorologische Studie zur Konsistenz der Philosophie Georg Simmels," in Böhringer and Gründer, eds., *Ästhetik und Soziologie, op. cit.*, p. 122.

16. See Simmel, "Lebensanschauung," *op. cit.*, Chs. 1 and 2.

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therefore, no one can live another's life. Since death is non-exchangeable, neither is life. Thus, it is completely individual.[17]

As in Ernst Jünger's accounts, in war life was experienced in the immediacy of death. The soldier gazing into his enemy's eyes experiences life in its immediacy. In combat, life is turned into a question of life *or* death. It is a question of who will be the first to shoot, and there is no second chance. In Simmel's most succinct formulation foreshadowing Heidegger, the question of life becomes the question of death — death as the ultimate limit.[18] "May it be my highest goal to be able to wish to die!" was Schleiermacher's Romantic resolution. Simmel, however, denies cravings for death. After first establishing that life is not subordinate to society in terms of exchangeability, Simmel proceeded to constitute life versus death in the form of an either/or. Thus, in his trajectory from the philosophy of money to that of life, he introduced the earliest terms of existentialism, since all that was needed was to replace "life" with "existence."

III

Simmel's insight into the relation between life and money[19] is linked with the transformation in his understanding of the relation between the rule and the exception. He composes a rule (money) that has a possible

17. See Georg Simmel, "Zur Metaphysik des Todes," in *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1909-1918*, Band I (Frankfurt a\M: Suhrkamp, 2001), pp. 81-96, "Vom Tode in der Kunst. Nach einem Vortrag," in *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1909-1918*, Vol. II (Frankfurt a\M: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 123-122, see the chapter "Tod und Unsterblichkeit," in *Lebensanschauung*, *op. cit.*, pp. 297-345. Simmel's starting point in his 1915 article on death in art is the shock accompanying the premature young soldiers' death in war. For the relation between rule and exception, Simmel declines to consider death as simply extraneous to life, as something one meets always unexpectedly — a meeting that culminates one's life. Rather, death-as-extraneous is in the very core of life.

18. According to Heidegger: "By its very essence, death is in every case mine." And "Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility." (§50) For Derrida, Heidegger's analysis, the other end of Simmel's formulation, focuses on how the essence of death is defined in terms of that of life. Yet, from both ends, Simmel's and Heidegger's analyses, in contradistinction to Lacan's, are existential. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* tr. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 1962); and Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, tr. by Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 28.

19. Simmel first recognizes "the conflict between individuality and the rule" in his 1902 article on "Rodins Plastik und die Geistesrichtung der Gegenwart," in *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901-1908*, Vol. I (Frankfurt a\M: Suhrkamp, 1995), pp. 92-100. After *The Philosophy of Money*, he still saw subject and object as necessarily out-of-joint. Yet, in the aesthetic sphere, he claimed that the "mind is completely submerged" in the work of art "not yet" or "no longer affected by the contrast between subject and object." Here, the submergence in the exception is a profession of (aesthetic) ecstasy. See Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

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exception (life). Simmel earlier espoused a theory of alienation — and alienation is a rule that allows no exception. Thus, he superseded his earlier analysis with an existential theory, which allows a moment of exception (life) to the rule of alienation (money).

During WWI, Simmel believed that the tragedy of the supremacy of form (money) over content (life) was temporarily suspended.[20] He considered the war a possible moment of radical change and an opportunity to bridge the unbearable and increasing separation of the subject from the object inherent in "the tragedy of modern culture." More to the point, this exceptional moment was made possible by a suspension of the rule. However, as the war dragged on, he changed his mind, and no longer found any promise for a possible positive development.[21] Despite this change of mind, Simmel went one step further in his radical attempt to confront the exception to the rule; he attempted to turn the exception into the rule. This took its most radical course in the last existential and vitalist phase of his writing. Two distinct sets of considerations coalesce here. First, the dialectics of "more-life" and "more-than-life," according to which life is essentially a never ending and continuous stream. Second, this stream also produces "non-life" (more-than-life); life produces forms, which then win their own life and logic. By its very nature, life is out of joint. This law could be termed the law of form (i.e., form constitutes the rule, not content). Thus, Simmel raised the principle of the disjointedness of content and form to the level of a metaphysical law.

He also attempted to go beyond Kant's categorical imperative. Clearly disturbed by the drive to universalize human existence (a law without exception), he sought to find a higher moral form, to formulate an "individual law" — a law too individual to be generalized. This law is strictly personal, i.e., tied to the individual's very essence.[22] Moreover, this essence is an existential (non-transcendental) ideal, and does not consider

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20. Simmel, "Die Krisis der Kultur" and "Deutschlands innere Wandlung," *op. cit.*, pp. 22, and 13-58.

21. See Hans Joas, "Die Klassiker der Soziologie und der Erste Weltkrieg," in *Machtpolitischer Realismus und pazifistische Utopie: Krieg und Frieden in der Geschichte der Sozialwissenschaften*, ed. by Hans Joas and Helmut Steiner (Frankfurt a\M: Suhrkamp, 1989), pp. 179-210, and "Kriegsideologien. Der Erste Weltkrieg im Spiegel der zeitgenössischen Sozialwissenschaften," in *Leviathan* 23 (1995), pp. 336-350.

22. Using the same term, Lacan wishes to have the subject accept "something that began to be articulated before him," and that is most probably the remotest from his own ideal. See Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, tr. by Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), p. 300.

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an "Other" (be it in the form of a single individual, the general public, humanity, etc.).[23] The individual follows his own ideal, thereby transcending the general law: the ethically-bound individual is not subject to the general rule, but to his own ideal, the exception.[24] By formulating this in terms of an imperative, Simmel turned what at first was an exception to the rule into a new rule:[25] the rule of obedience to the exception.[26]

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23. This is the same move as in his wartime writings, where the fighting soldier is given account *only* in terms of the (Germanic) ideal he is fighting for. It fails to take note of the enemy soldiers, and that they too may have their own ideal. See Simmel, "Deutschlands innere Wandlung," *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

24. Levine offers an alternative genealogy to the "Individual Law." He argues that Kant's ethical adherence to universal laws was, in Fichte's hands, turned into an admonition to act in accord with voluntarily chosen ideals, later followed by Nietzsche's dictum "Become what you are." Thus, the "Individual Law" must not form a universal maxim, but be based on one's authentic being. However, Simmel was attempting to reconcile Nietzsche and Kant, whom he understood as initiating two irreconcilable ideals rather than the one (Nietzsche) culminating in the other (Kant). Yet another genealogy is offered by Schmidt: whereas for Kant self-accomplishment was found in the law of freedom, Simmel saw the reiteration of the law in the antinomical law of transgression, in an "existential lawless state of emergency." This interpretation, however, overlooks Simmel's attempt not to replace law with lawlessness, but to formulate the law of the individual. See Donald N. Levine, *Visions of the Sociological Tradition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), pp. 207-208. Schmidt, *Der häretische Imperative. . ., op. cit.*, pp. 26 and 127.

25. The same happens with love. According to Simmel's earlier Kantian framework, love as a full union between individuals is not possible. Yet, later Simmel allows a moment of union. More, this love union is presented in terms of the exception. Shortly before his death, Simmel wrote: "This is precisely the miracle of love. It does not nullify the being-for-itself of either the I or the Thou. On the contrary, it makes this being-for-itself into a condition under which that nullification of distance and the egoistic reversion of the existential will to itself follow. This is a completely irrational phenomenon that resists the categories of logic, which in other respects hold valid." See "On Love," in *Georg Simmel: On Women, Sexuality, and Love*, tr. by Guy Oakes (New York: Yale University Press: 1984), p. 155. Whereas logic is the rational rule, love is the exception. Here the impossible is possible. "What is involved in love?" Lacan asks in the first meeting of his 1972-73 seminar *Encore*, "is love about making one?" See Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, tr. by Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 5. Lacan's answer seems to move him much closer to where Simmel started than where he ended. In 1892-1893, Simmel wrote that love is simply "Egoismus zu Zweien"! See Georg Simmel, *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft* (Frankfurt a\M: Suhrkamp, 1989) Vol. I, p. 120. Here Lacan remains loyal to his desiring subject, and repeatedly says that there is perhaps a one — it is only the one of pure difference. "We are but one," Lacan writes, but "everyone knows, of course, that two have never become but one, but nevertheless 'we are but one.' The idea of love begins with that." Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality . . ., op. cit.*, p. 47. Love is the *illusory* fantasy of the sexual relation in the form of a fusion with another subject, and no exception to the rule.

26. See Simmel, "Lebensanschauung," *op cit.*, p. 314, where he speaks of life's "beyond," having no object, but "pure life mediated only by itself." Another formulation is that the outside is inside (p. 357) — which is precisely what Lacan later attempted to invert.

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Lacan's analysis of the robbers' question deals with different concerns. His early work may be seen as stamped by existentialism,[27] whereas later he targets these existential formulations. The first such instance is Lacan's insistence, in his reading of Antigone, on dividing death into physical and symbolic.[28] This is what allows the unique situation of "being between the two deaths." Life loses its privileged status of being primary and non-divisible, as Simmel and other existentialists claimed.[29] Where does the robbers' question reveal that Lacan supersedes existentialism? His answer takes as its starting point the existential notion of the primacy of life as non-exchangeable, while at the same time eliminating its very core.

He discusses the robbers' question in the context of his theory of alienation. "Everything emerges from the structure of the signifier. This structure is based on . . . the function of the cut and which is now articulated . . . as the topological function of the rim."[30] The effect of the signifier is to disjoin meaning from being.[31] Unlike Simmel's differentiation of form and content, money and life, alienation obtains in a vel, and there are "two of them . . . one's as good as the other. These two vels are not alike." In fact, Lacan argues that there is a third vel of alienation. The subject's being, induced by the signifier, is beneath meaning; as it emerges in the field of the Other, meaning is eclipsed by the disappearance of being. "The vel of alienation is defined by a choice whose properties depend on

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27. As late as "Function and Field of Speech and Language," where he still employs Heideggerian terms. See *Ecrit: A Selection*, tr. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 103.

28. See his "The Essence of Tragedy: A Commentary on Sophocles's Antigone," in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-270. Seneca remarks that "No sooner is the human being born than he is already old enough to die." Lacan, on the other hand, speaks about those animals that are born dead, or of the subject that can only "enter into the play in the mode of death." See Seneca, "On the Shortness of Life," *Moral Essays, Vol. II*, tr. by John W. Basore (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932): Book 10:3.1-4 (translation modified). Jacques Lacan, "On a Question Preliminary to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis," in *Ecrit: A Selection*, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

29. Miller develops Lacan's statements concerning life and death, paying special attention to Lacan's interpretation of Freud, and connecting them with the natural sciences. See Jacques-Alain Miller, *Habiologia Halakanianit Veiruei Haguf* (Jerusalem: Hakvutza Haisraelit shel Haaskola Haeiropeit Lepsichoanalyza, 2000), and *Etzem Haanaliza* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2001).

30. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, tr. by Allan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 206.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 207: "The signifier, producing itself in the field of the Other, makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject."

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this, that there is, in the joining, one element that, whatever the choice operating may be, has its consequence a neither one, nor the other."[32]

Here Lacan recalls the robbers' question: "Your money or your life?" For Simmel, the choice is an either/or in the sense that each precludes the other. Lacan moves on a close, but different track. In contradistinction to Simmel, "money or life" is not "death or life." The robbers do pose a question, and the victim does have a choice. However, the robbers' question exemplifies a "forced choice." "If I choose money," he writes, "I lose both. If I choose life, I have life without the money, namely, life deprived of something."[33] At first, life and money are complementary. Lacan implies that real life is with this something (money). Life without it is life deprived of something. "The choice, then, is a matter of knowing whether one wishes to preserve one of the parts, the other disappearing in any case."[34] What differentiates him from Simmel is that in losing one's life one also loses money: there is no money without life. Although there are at least two answers, only one maintains something. It is not a free choice, because there is no way to give up life and to keep money. The only option is to lose both life and money, or only money.

In Simmel, life-death restates content-form; money is merely a metonym for form\death. In Lacan, life-money-death forms a triad. Money and life do not contradict each other, nor is money a metonym of life. Rather, money is on the side of life, which, however, one must surrender. Unlike in Simmel, surrendering money, as opposed to surrendering life has nothing to do with death. The victim's only choice entails loosing life's most precious thing. One has two alternatives to choose what is already pre-determined (by the Other) before the choice — the money is going to the robbers. Like Simmel, but for the opposite reason, Lacan introduces death as, so to speak, a joker. The question is "freedom or death," and "because death comes into play, there occurs an effect with a rather different structure. This is because, in both cases, I will have both . . . You choose freedom. Well! You've got freedom to die. . . . in the condition in which someone says to you, *freedom or death!,* the only proof of freedom that you can have . . . is precisely to choose death, for there, you

32. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 212. Lacan's diagram for the relation between money and life does not accord with his written example. In the diagram, there are two circles (one is money, the other life) partly conflated. The two circles share the same status. In the example, Lacan makes absolutely clear that money is not equal to life, because it exists — for the victim — only as long as there is life (i.e., fully subdued to it).

34. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

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show that you have freedom of choice."[35] Since money, is not just "something," but the most precious thing (more precious, perhaps, than life itself, yet secondary to it), Lacan's treatment also illustrates the relation between the rule and the exception. He recognizes that the rule has an exception by demonstrating that the relation between them is structural: the exception to the rule is a constitutive exception generated by the rule.

Simmel and Lacan were not only separated by two generations, but also by the emergence of psychoanalysis. The radical change in the rule-exception relation cannot be understood independently of Lacan's developments of Freud's psychoanalysis. More concretely, it results from the shift from the philosophical subject of consciousness to the psychoanalytical subject of the unconscious — the desiring subject.[36] This same logic can be seen at work elsewhere. He poses a desiring subject, who always desires to "enjoy more," to the point of wanting to transgress his prohibitions. But this "more enjoyment" is a structural point where enjoyment turns into suffering. One always desires more enjoyment, while in reality there is no full enjoyment. In his 1959-1960 seminar, Lacan distinguished between the object and the thing.[37] In terms of enjoyment, the thing is a material object raised to a status beyond what enjoyment of a mere object can bring.[38] It is

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35. *Ibid.*, p. 213. Lacan places freedom on the side of death, not life. This is a death-blow to, and a departure from, a long tradition that takes authentic life as an exercise for death, beginning with Plato, through Hegel's death as condition for freedom, and up to Heidegger's authentic life as "Being-towards-death." See Plato, *Phaedo* in *Collected Dialogues*, tr. by H. Trendennick, ed. by Hamilton and Cairns, *84a.* Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time, op. cit.*, §53. See also Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault,* ed. by Arnold I. Davidson, tr. by Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), especially pp. 45-101.

36. Jacques Lacan, "Responses to Students of Philosophy Concerning the Object of Psychoanalysis," in: *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, tr. by Jeffrey Mehlman (New York: Norton, 1990), pp. 107-114.

37. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, op. cit.,* p. 52. "The world of our experience, the Freudian world, assumes that it is this object, *das Ding*, as the absolute Other of the subject, that one is supposed to find again. It is to be found at the most as something missed. One does not find it, but only its pleasurable associations. It is in this state of wishing for it and waiting for it that, in the name of the pleasure principle, the optimum tension will be sought; below that there is neither perception nor effort."

38. *Ibid.*, p. 68: "What we find in the incest law is located as such at the level of the unconscious in relation to *das Ding*, the [t]hing. The desire for the mother cannot be satisfied because it is the end, the terminal point, the abolition of the whole world of demand, which is the one that at its deepest level structures man's unconscious. It is to the extent that the function of the pleasure principle is to make man always search for what he has to find again, but which he never will attain, that one reaches the essence, namely, that sphere or relationship which is known as the law of the prohibition of incest."

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raised to the status of (impossible) enjoyment — to "more enjoyment" beyond the pleasure principle. The "thing" designates the structural impossibility of the subject to fully enjoy.

The rule generates its own exception. Lacan makes clear that, e.g., the prohibition of incest is a structural necessity. Transgressing this prohibition would not bring about happiness, only suffering. The incest prohibition is therefore the prohibition of something that is impossible from the very beginning. In fact, the prohibition is there to sustain the illusion that the impossible is possible, but not allowed. The rule generates an exception. But this exception is impossible to realize. When this transgression is realized, it is self-defeating, and therefore is better avoided in the first place (more enjoyment is mere suffering).

IV

For Simmel, money was the barrier to life. He reached this formulation in his analysis of how a life-process becomes autonomous of its cause. It springs out of the teleological line and becomes itself the *telos*. For Lacan, money stands for the very substance of life, i.e., for enjoyment. In both cases, the relation between life and money is not coincidental, but necessary. In both cases, it concerns the rule and its exception. Both theories constitute rules, which stand in relation to an exception. Simmel articulates life in order to challenge the rule of money. Thus, life is the effect of money; it has meaning only in relation to the rule of money. Money constitutes life as its exception. But in Lacan's scheme, being is constituted in terms of lack (already a confrontation with existentialism), and this lack is the effect of meaning (man being embedded in language; as subject of the other, he is always in the state of lack of being). Therefore, money is the effect of life. In Simmel's case, life is the possible exception to money; in Lacan's case, money is the impossible effect of life.

Clearly, Simmel and Lacan differ concerning the relation between life and money. For Simmel, money is an obstruction to life; for Lacan, it is its very substance. Yet, they are closer than it seems. Simmel's posing of life as an answer to money indicates how he established the rule of money by means of an exception. Similarly, his analysis of individuality and life in terms of death during WWI was mainly the result of confronting mass death. This posing of life as what cannot be overpowered by money is therefore close to Lacan's formulation of the irreplaceable value of the exception to the rule, which inverts Simmel's relation between the rule and the exception. So, while Simmel called for following the exception and

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trying to realize it, Lacan ruled this out: the rule of life (meaning) effects an exception (money) as a lack that cannot be filled. Whereas Simmel superseded his sociology (money) with existentialism (life), Lacan superseded existentialism with something closer to Simmel's starting point.

Simmel (and others of his generation) worked hard to develop a new ethical rule, according to which the exception is possible, and should be followed. Lacan also recognized that the rule generates an exception, but he saw this exception as structural, and impossible to realize. In a way, this treatment of the exception is a return to Kant. Lacan does not suggest a naive return to a rule without exception, does not deny the exception to the rule, and does not call for a general rule. But he wants to constitute the exception as a necessary moment of the rule, and, as such, fundamentally unrealizable. In this sense, he is proposing an ethics of the rule.[39]

While in his later work Simmel posed life in purely existential terms, as singular and non-recurring, two generations later Lacan superseded this existentialism. Earlier, Lacan took for granted what Simmel and others had concluded, and later sought to subvert life as existence by analyzing it in terms of enjoyment. The fullness of existence equals the fullness of enjoyment. According to Lacan, for subjects who are not psychotic this full enjoyment is impossible. This impossible enjoyment cannot be expressed in existential terms. Here it is necessary to differentiate between a level of existence in which this enjoyment does not exist, and one in which it does, according to its effects. Existential terms cannot articulate such a position, since they do not recognize anything outside of existence.

To posit an impossible enjoyment, Lacan is forced to reintroduce essentialist terms. While he does not want to return to pre-existential notions of transcendental essence, he makes clear that existential terms alone cannot account for impossible enjoyment. This enjoyment is impossible only in reality, i.e., on the existential level, but not on the psychic level, where human beings are embedded in language.

Simmel argues on the existential, Lacan on a structural level. Simmel's human being is alienated by technology. As with all cultural matters, money is an existential form which causes alienation. Lacan's subject is

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39. Whereas Kierkegaard claimed that "the exception explains the general as well as itself," here Lacan is strangely close to Nietzsche, for whom "the rule is more interesting than the exception!" See Kierkegaard, quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone, 1999), p. 48. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good & Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, tr. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 37.

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alienated[40] by the very fact that he is the speaking animal.[41] These two kinds of alienation point to a theoretical difference, and a different ethics exemplified in the robbery situation. Both Simmel and Lacan would say "life," by which Simmel would mean standing up to technology, and Lacan the recognition of being the subject of language.

V

Here, a passing reference to Carl Schmitt is in order. Schmitt's understanding of sovereignty cannot be extended to include individual ethics. However, his concept of the exception in politics shares something fundamental with Simmel. Schmitt too — albeit much more swiftly — moves from recognizing the exception to the rule as a problem[42] to calling for the actualization of the exception as a solution.[43] What gives this logical isomorphism particular significance is the fact that Simmel's and Schmitt's respective political programs were clearly at odds. Yet, what separates Simmel (and Schmitt) from Lacan is their respective conceptual frameworks rather than their political designs. It has more to do with the shift that occurred from pre-WWII existentialist terms of consciousness to post-WWII psychoanalytic-structural terms of unconscious desire.

According to Schmitt, the sovereign is included by way of exclusion:[44]

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40. Cf. Georg Simmel, "The Conflict in Modern Culture" and "On the Concept and Tragedy of Culture," in *Georg Simmel: The Conflict in Modern Culture . . . , op. cit.*, pp. 11-26, and pp. 27-46. See also Rudolph H. Weingartner, *Experience and Culture: The Philosophy of Georg Simmel* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), pp. 71-84; and Albert Solomon, "Money and Alienation," in *Georg Simmel*, ed. by Lewis A. Coser (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall. Inc., 1965), pp. 135-137, and, in the same collection, Raymond Aron, "Culture and Life," pp.138-141.

41. See Lacan's first and fourth parts of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, op. cit.*, pp. 17-53 and 203-262; the first section in *Lacan and the Subject of Language*, ed. by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Bracher (New York: Routledge, 1991); the second part of *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 19-74; and Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

42. Carl Schmitt, *Die Diktatur* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 1978).

43. John P. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 121-124 and 133-141. "In the exception, the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition." Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology, op. cit.*, p. 15. Whereas in *Die Diktatur* the end is a return to the normal *status quo ante*, in *Political Theology* it is redeemed by the exception as the solution — a solution that turns itself into a new rule.

44. Carl Schmitt, *Über die drei Arten des rechtswissenschaftlichen Denkens* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 1993), pp. 23-24.

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"the sovereign creates and guarantees the situation as a whole in its totality."[45] Simmel and Lacan agree that the exception is cardinal for the rule, that the rule "proves nothing, the exception proves everything: it confirms not only the rule but also its existence, which derives only from the exception."[46] and that the sovereign "is he who decides on the exception."[47] Along with Simmel's, Schmitt's doctrine of sovereignty of the will is much closer to Kant than Lacan's. Kant's ethical doctrine ascribes morality only to the conscious action of the self-determining, autonomous individual; the individual will is the center of the universe. Lacan reads the statement concerning sovereignty in terms of the subject/ego distinction. The question of sovereignty, i.e., of the highest, independent underived power, belongs to the domain of the ego (i.e., in his algebra, *i(a), not petit a*) not the subject. That Schmitt is moving within the sphere of the ego is also apparent when he claims that "the enemy is our own question as form."[48] The sphere of the ego is the sphere of mirrors and images (rather than objects or things). Schmitt's formulations shed light on Simmel's "individual law." In what corresponds to Schmitt's sovereign decision, Simmel's individual interiorizes what exceeds him, designating himself as external to himself, includes his own outside, thereby constituting his "individual law." Simmel and Schmitt call for recognizing and actualizing the exception. They both claim that the exception overturns the rule.

Since Simmel's framework does not recognize the unconscious, he postulates a law based on the individual's self-image or his own ideal. Ultimately, the "individual law" is in the sphere of the ego and the superego, not the subject. Paradoxically, in his last teaching Lacan develops a very different ethics, based on a form of decisionism much closer to Schmitt's early work than to his own earlier formulations. Lacan moves away from the "subject," which is by necessity passive, determined by the other (the subject is a subject only by virtue of his subjection to the field of the other),[49] to his neologism "*parlêtre*," the "speaking-being," which decides for himself. In line with Schmitt, who states that the rule includes by exclusion (establishes a relation with what is outside it), the later

45. Schmitt, *Die Diktatur*, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
46. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
48. *Ex Captivitate Salus* (Cologne: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1950). Schmitt's German word is "*Gestalt*," which could be translated as "image."
49. Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955, Book II,* tr. by Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1988), p. 188.

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Lacan elaborates the topography of the "moebius strip."[50] This three-dimensional figure seems to have two sides (an inside and an outside), whereas it is impossible to say at which moment one has crossed over from the inside to the outside (or vice versa).[51] This is an attempt to elaborate what must first appear as an oxymoron: "a sovereign subject."[52] The "*parlêtre*," in contradistinction to his earlier "subject," is no longer formed in relation to an impossible exception.

For Hans Kelsen, "the concept of sovereignty must be radically repressed,"[53] — to which Schmitt replied that "the exception is the unsubsumable."[54] Schmitt believed in the "return of the repressed." In other words, he believed it is not possible to repress the exception. In attempting to realize what cannot be repressed, one finds Schmitt clearly on the side of Simmel. Lacan, on the other hand, unties the dichotomy of either repression or return of the repressed by articulating an exception that one must recognize as structurally necessary, albeit as impossible to realize.

VI

Returning to the robbers' question, each for his own reasons, both Simmel and Lacan would be thankful to the robbers: Simmel, because the robbers would deliver the victim from the shackles of money; Lacan, because their intervention would deliver the subject from fantasizing a condition other than being in a constant state of a lack of being.

When a certain theory is "superseded" by another, does it leave traces in the new theory, that takes its place? In Lacan's new theory, money stands for the impossible substance of life. This is right for the analysand.

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50. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, op. cit.*, p. 156.

51. Without citing Lacan, Agamben appears to be referring to Lacanian arguments, such as the logic of the moabius band that obfuscates inside and outside, the inevitable violence inherent in language, and the logic according to which "to speak" is "always to 'speak the law'." Or "The sovereign exception is thus the figure in which singularity is represented as such." See Agamben, *Homo Sacer . . ., op. cit.*, pp. 20-21 and 37.

52. Nicolaus Sombart ends his book on Schmitt with a discussion of the "utopia of the sovereign subject." Lacan's abandonment of the subject for the "*parlêtre*," or his topographies of the "moebius strip" indicate the vindication of the drive-driven sovereign-subject. See Nicolaus Sombart, *Die deutschen Männer und ihre Feinde. Carl Schmitt – ein deutsches Schicksal zwischen Männerbund und Matriarchalmythos* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1991), p. 370. Independently of Lacan, Agamben develops a subject that is at one and the same time subject and sovereign, "active with respect to its own passivity." See Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz . . ., op. cit.*, p. 109.

53. Hans Kelsen, *Das Problem der Souveränität und die Theorie des Völksrechts* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1920), p. 320.

54. Schmitt, *Die Diktatur*, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

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But what does money stand for in relation to the robber (the analyst)? If one remains in the domain of money, this is the other side of the same coin. This is a very Simmelian moment in Lacan. As early as 1955, in his reading of Poe's purloined letter, Lacan explained what is involved in the analytic situation: The analyst robs the analysand of his substance (enjoyment), and in return receives money.[55] Are then money and enjoyment, in the case of the analyst, simply synonymous? Does the analyst enjoy? Is the analyst able to enjoy anything the analysand provides? No, because the money that the analysand gives is not the money that the analyst receives. Money simply stands for the strongest neutralizer. It is only by taking money from the analysand that the analyst can secure his indifference (i.e., his desire as an analyst), which enables him to "pull out of the game" and to "neutralize something far more dangerous than paying in money, namely, owing somebody something."[56]

Both Simmel and Lacan superseded one theory in favor of another, and both reached radical conclusions. Simmel saw his Kantian-based sociology of form and content as leaving out the most essential, and superseded it with an existential philosophy of life. Lacan saw existentialism as concealing a lack of being, which caused him to develop a new theory. Thus, both Simmel and Lacan were forced to confront the question of the rule and the exception. In this sense, both denied a general rule with no exception. Neither Simmel nor Lacan were willing to compromise for a plurality of rules (and exceptions), as did a later generation. In different ways, they insisted on settling the question of the rule and its exception. Simmel broke his Kantian framework to admit a point of exception, calling for a radical ethics of following the exception. Lacan maintained that the exception is necessary for supporting of the rule. Its realization (which is not its realization at all) merely brings suffering.

Paradoxically, Lacan introduced a theory that came closer to Simmel's earlier theory (albeit with a certain twist). If this return is linked not only to epistemological shifts, but also to the murderous events of the first half of the 20th century, then the transformation in the relation between rule and exception acquires particular significance.[57] Both Simmel and

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55. Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory. Book II*, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-205.
56. *Ibid.* p. 204.
57. Agamben interprets Nazi concentration camps in just this way: "The camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule." See Agamben, *Homo Sacer . . .*, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-169 (italics in original); and *Remnants of Auschwitz . . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

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Lacan recognized a rule that has an exception. Both theories can be seen as composing a rule that sublimates its exception. They differ sharply only in the ethical stance called for by their theories with respect to the sublimated exception. Each in his own way called for a radical ethics of the exception. Simmel called for realization of the exception. Lacan called for a different kind of radical ethics. The sublimated exception to the rule is the one call that cannot be followed, whereby the refusal to follow the sublimated exception is at the core of his radical ethics.

Simmel's and Lacan's theories document a historical era, that of the post-self-identical subject, or two modes of the *Zeitgeist* of the "transgressing subject." Apropos money, they are so to speak two sides of the same coin. In this sense, the historical abyss that so clearly separates their theories (spanning from before WWI to after WWII) is also the one that connects them, making them intimate and inseparable. Simmel's and Lacan's theories address a monstrous 20th century. These theories are false rather than obsolete. However, to rephrase Orwell, this does not change the fact that some theories are more false than others (Simmel's is more false). What do their theories mean today? Can one retrieve anything valuable and concrete from them? Today, it is not clear whether their accounts can be taken seriously. But this does not mean that there is nothing to learn from them. Although this would not be a solution, a physician may recommend a diet combining the early Lacan (life rather than money) with the early Simmel (money rather than life). If there is correspondence between exceptions, violence, and enjoyment, the right diet rules out exceptions. On this concrete level, apropos the two forms of decisionism discussed, the Hebrew word for *telos* is *tachlit*, meaning the end or purpose (but in business, *tachles* means down to business, to the point). However, a homonym of *tachlit* in Hebrew means something quite different, namely, *decide* (masculine imperative form). These two distinct meanings expressed in Hebrew by the same sound reveal what remains implicit in Simmel and Lacan: the fact that the decision is grounded in and derived from the end; *telos* is ultimately an end that decides. The ultimate end. If Simmel and Lacan teach anything, it is that this hermeneutic circle is deadly. Alas, this recognition will not bring eternal peace to the world. Nonetheless, it indicates an alternative end — the alternative of the impossible end. One must choose the impossible structure over the actually potential. As a rule, possible alternatives are worse.

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Notes and Commentary:

Does the Bible Legitimate Israeli Settlements?[1]

Aryeh Botwinick

The religious and political movement that led to the legitimation and colonization of settlements on the West Bank of the Jordan River and in Gaza in the aftermath of Israel's spectacular victory over threatening Arab neighbors — Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Jordan — in the Six Day War (1967) is a major manifestation of contemporary false messianism. Indeed, Israel's victory appeared to be so overwhelming, swift, and decisive that it led many Jews (especially religious ones in the US) to a headlong rush to supplant the traditional secular basis of politics with a religious, messianic foundation. In some crucial respects, the messianic era in Jewish religion could be said to have begun at that time. If the victory in the Six Day War were framed in these terms, rather than in terms of military and political compromises such as those that resulted from the War of Independence (1948), then the unification of Israel and of Jerusalem in accord with a set of biblically sanctioned boundaries could be pursued systematically. On the agenda of many of the settlers in "The Territories" (explicitly stipulated in some cases, but held in tacit reserve in many others) was a rebuilding of the Temple that would broadcast to all the world the spiritual foundation and significance of the Israeli political project. Shlomo Goren, Chief Chaplain of the Israeli Army during the Six Day War, tried to get the Israeli military to blow up the mosques on the Temple Mount, but was thwarted by Uzi Narkiss, the general in command of the Jordanian front.[2]

Among the repercussions of the Six Day War were that Israel became thoroughly embedded in Middle East politics and the domestic political map was redrawn. As a result of Israeli victory, remaining Jewish (Sephardic) populations in the Arab world fled to Israel for refuge, and thousands of American Jews emigrated there. The Sephardim, who emigrated in a state of distress, and the Americans, who emigrated in a state of relative affluence, shared a common desire to displace the mundane basis of politics with a politics focused on individual spiritual

1. Except for the introduction, this article was written in 1999.
2. Tony Judt, "After Victory," in *The New Republic* (July 29, 2002), p. 32.

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regeneration and collective national and universal redemption. The cramped literalism of popular Sephardic spirituality converged with the expansive apocalyptic yearnings of post-1960s American Jewish spirituality to engender a gnostically-fused religious and political sensibility hankering after certainty and redemption. It was in this context that the ascendancy of the Labor Party in Israeli politics ended, and Menahem Begin (who previously had been consigned by the configurations of Israeli politics to "permanent" minority status) and his successors were able to ride the crest of Israeli political power. It was also in this political context that the settlement movement had its greatest political impact.

The transformations in Israeli domestic, regional, and international politics wrought by the Six Day War have occluded the existing Israeli political condition, so that it requires a real effort of historical recovery to recapture what constituted the Israeli political mainstream before 1967. Such centrist Israeli political leaders as Levi Eshkol (who was Prime Minister during the Six Day War) and Abba Eban rejected the idea of settlements on principled political grounds. When the War began, Eshkol said: "Even if we conquer the Old City and the West Bank, in the end we will have to leave them."[3] "On June 19, 1967, the Israeli cabinet secretly voted to accept the principle of returning occupied land in exchange for lasting peace."[4] David Ben-Gurion, Israel's founding political leader, advised his compatriots against retaining the territories. Abba Eban invoked the dual constraints of prophetic and Zionist teaching in discrediting the idea of territories: "The exercise of permanent rule over a foreign nation can only be defended by an ideology and rhetoric of self-worship and exclusiveness that are incompatible with the ethical legacy of prophetic Judaism and classical Zionism."[5]

In 1968, Yeshayahu Leibowitz argued for a return of the conquered territories: "The land of Israel is the Holy Land and the Temple Mount is a holy place only by virtue of the *Mitzvoth* [commandments] linked to these locations. These *Mitzvoth* were not associated with the land and the mountain because these are 'holy.' On the contrary, their 'holiness' derives from the *Mitzvoth* associated with them. The idea that a specific country or location have an intrinsic 'holiness' is an indubitably idolatrous idea. . . . Nationalism and patriotism as such are not religious values. . . . The rabbis who argue today that we should keep the territories for 'religious reasons' are not carrying on the tradition of Elijah and the prophets of God but rather of the 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah, 'who ate at the table of Jezebel'."[6] Leibowitz's understanding of "holiness" — that it does not refer to an intrinsic essence, in this case associated with the land of Israel, but is rather a label applied

3. Quoted in Judt, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
6. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, ed. by Eliezer Goldman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 227. The Mishnaic source cited by Leibowitz is Kelim I.6.

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to a particular area of the world that is thicker with Biblical imperatives than other pieces of land — is part of a larger strategy that seeks to deconstruct the central categories of Judaism (including, preeminently, the concept of God) to make them cohere better to the limits of reason, rather than to represent some transcendent purging of them.[7] Leibowitz's project can be supported further by recasting some core biblical texts, thereby contributing to the delegitimation of the use of the Bible for underwriting the Israeli government's current expansionist political programs.

A distinction between negative theology and gnosticism animates some of the most arresting passages in the biblical text. Here, the biblical descriptions of Moses' confrontations with his Jewish archenemy — Korah — and his non-Jewish archenemy — Amalek — is crucial. The same goes for such central biblical events as the theological transgression of the *Dor Ha-Pelagah* (the builders of the tower of Babel), the theological distinctness of the post-expulsion (from the Garden of Eden) stage in relation to the pre-expulsion stage, the significance of the biblical accounts of Creation and prophecy, the transgressions involved in fashioning the Golden Calf, of Nadab and Abihu, and the spies, as well as a number of striking metaphors in the biblical narrative, such as Jacob's Ladder and the Burning Bush.

One should begin with the Bible's description of Moses in contrast to the way it characterizes his archenemy, Korah, who leads a rebellion against him. In this account, Moses is called an *Eved Hashem* — servant of God.[8] "*Eved*" is the term used to describe the servile status of the Jews in Egypt. Moses is not deified in the biblical account of the Exodus, which pays close attention to intra-family rivalries between Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, and the vagaries of class position (Moses' adoption by the Pharaoh's daughter) in charting his rise to prominence.[9] Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses "because of the Cushite woman" he had taken. The Bible juxtaposes to their rebuke the statement that "Moses was very humble above all the men who were upon the face of the earth."[10] Moses felt powerless to speak out against them. As the parent-favored and sibling-resented youngest child, his preferred medium of communication was action — picking up the cues of opportunity earlier than other people and responding more swiftly. There is an eerie congruence between the physical oppression of the Jewish people and the psychological oppression of Moses — with the configuration of Moses' oppression encoding for him a strategic way out, which he is able to apply to relieve the people's condition.

The humanizing of Moses, which is symptomatic of the biblical account of

7. *Ibid.*
8. Numbers 12:7.
9. The Bible squarely situates Moses in the throes of what Harold Bloom, following Freud, has called "a family romance." See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Seabury, 1975); and *Poetry and Repression* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).
10. Numbers 12:3.

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his career, is perceived by the rabbis as a disguised theological statement. The rabbis read the biblical text as burning the most plausible bridge between humanity and God — namely Moses — in order to underscore that the distance between humans and God remains unbridgeable. In the Passover Haggadah's recounting of the Exodus story, compiled by later generations of rabbis, Moses is nearly omitted, so that the inscrutability of the divine role in redemption is not marred by any overly intrusive human presence.

The biblical prototype for a gnostic believer is Korah, who rebels against the structure of authority instituted by Moses in the desert, by saying to Moses and Aaron: "Ye take too much upon you, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Eternal is among them: why then lift up yourselves above the assembly of the Eternal?"[11] The Hebrew phrase "*U'Betocham Hashem*" is ambiguous. The word "*Toch*" in Hebrew can be translated as "among" or "inside," so the phrase would read: "and the Eternal is inside them." While the theological import of the passage remains the same, the gnostic thrust of Korah's rebellion against Moses is most graphically communicated by the word "inside." God is not *outside* the community of believers, so that a stable and legitimate structure of authority is needed to transmit and enforce His messages. He is rather *inside* the psyches (if not the bodies) of believers, so that patterns of interaction can be more anarchic and spontaneous. By contrast, Moses serves as the personification of a negative-theological set of understandings. The idea of negative theology for him contains an implied legitimation for rabbinic authority. The voluntarism encoded in negative theology sanctions for Moses the institution of a collectively ordered response to God's role through the introduction of systems of authority and hierarchy.

Further biblical examples of the negative theology versus gnosticism typology include:

1. The Tower of Babel. Here is the biblical narrative surrounding the attempt to build the Tower of Babel: "And the whole earth was of one language and of few words. And it came to pass as they journeyed from the east that they found a deep valley in the land of Shinar and they abode there. And they said one to another 'Come let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.' And they had brick for stone and bitumen had they for mortar. And they said 'Come we will build for us a city and a tower whose head may reach unto heaven and we will make for us a name lest we be scattered upon the face of the whole earth.' And the Eternal came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men had built. And the Eternal said 'Behold it is one people and they have all one language and this they begin to do and now shall they not be precluded from anything which they have devised to do? Come we will go down and there confound their language that they may not understand one another's speech.' So the Eternal scattered them from thence upon

11. Numbers 16:3. The translation comes from an edition of the *Pentateuch* published in Jerusalem in 1973 — no publisher listed. All subsequent translations of the *Pentateuch* come from this edition.

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the face of all the earth and they ceased to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel because the Eternal did there confound the language of all the earth and from thence did the Eternal scatter them upon the face of all the earth."[12]

One possible reading of the Tower of Babel story is that the sin of the builders consists in their desire to appropriate God — to bring Him down to earth — to make Him literally part of themselves. From this perspective, the human beings building the Tower of Babel were quintessential gnostics. This reading is reinforced by the Bible's emphasis that both in order to thwart their plans and as punishment God fragments their universal language into a multiplicity of languages, as if to drive home the point that human beings are doomed to endless paraphrasing — to spinning metaphors endlessly — without arriving at the source of what ostensibly their metaphors are about. Theologically speaking, the builders of the Tower of Babel express a deep revulsion against the ever-expanding middle of human life, and God, as it were, reaffirms that middle.

2. There are affinities between this construal of the Tower of Babel story and Maimonides' reading of the transgression of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In his commentary, Rashi suggests that the Bible is intimating the illuminative force of such a juxtapostion. In the quoted passage, the Bible refers to the builders of the tower of Babel as the "children of men." Following a hermeneutical principle of radical parsimony (that the Bible opts for the most terse formulation compatible with the meaning it seeks to convey), Rashi raises the question "But whose children could they have been (except the children of man, i.e., human beings) — perhaps the children of donkeys or camels? But it means the children of Adam Harishon (the First Man — the word "Adam" in the text which means literally man, i.e., generic man, is now understood to refer to Adam, the first human being that God had created)."[13]

According to Maimonides, the pre-expulsion situation enjoyed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was defined by the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood: "Through the intellect one distinguishes between truth and falsehood, and that was found in [Adam] in its perfection and integrity. Fine and bad, on the other hand, belong to the things generally accepted as known, not to those cognized by the intellect. . . . However, when he disobeyed and inclined toward his desires of the imagination and the pleasures of his corporeal senses — inasmuch as it is said: *that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes* (Genesis 3:6) — he was punished by being deprived of that intellectual apprehension. He therefore disobeyed the commandment that was imposed upon him on account of his intellect and, becoming endowed with the faculty of apprehending generally accepted things, he became absorbed in judging things to be bad or fine. . . . With regard to what is of necessity, there is no good or evil at all, but only the

12. Genesis 11:1-9.

13. *Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary: Genesis*, tr. by M. Rosenbaum and A. M. Silbermann (Jerusalem, 1973), p. 45.

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false and the *true*."[14] According to Maimonides, the story of the expulsion from Eden amounts to convention being substituted for truth. Man can no longer know anything beyond what convention sanctions. "Good" and "bad," which are conventionalist terms, are substituted for "true" and "false," which are essentialist terms.[15]

Following Rashi in making sense of the tower of Babel story in light of the story concerning the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, it now is possible to appreciate the deep thematic continuity linking the two stories. The generation of the Tower of Babel were seeking to recoup Adam's loss. They were trying to recapture the idiom of truth which Adam had lost and to throw overboard the idiom of approximation which was already their fate. If the lesson here is that one cannot aspire to a truth beyond convention, then there is never a point in theory or in its practical translations where an anchor can be dropped safely on a reality beyond verbal constructions. The generation of the Tower of Babel sought to reestablish such a secure point of anchorage and are rebuffed, as it were, by God, who jealously and zealously safeguards His negative-theological identity.

3. A second reading of the tower of Babel text would explore its affinities with the Netziv's (Naphtali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin's) interpretation of Amalek's military confrontation with Israel soon after the exodus from Egypt. The biblical text reads: "Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua 'Choose us out men and go out fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in mine hand.' So Joshua did as Moses had said to him to fight with Amalek and Moses Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass when Moses lifted up his hand that Israel prevailed and when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed. But Moses's hands were heavy and they took a stone and put it under him and he sat thereon and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands the one on the one side and the other on the other side and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. And the Eternal said unto Moses, 'Write this for a memorial in the book and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua for I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.' And Moses built an altar and called the name of it Hashem-nisi. For he said 'Because the hand is on the throne of Yah, war from the Eternal with Amalek from generation to generation'."[16]

The Netziv raises the following questions about this text. What is the meaning of the Bible's vehement, everlasting denunciation of Amalek? If the Bible is referring to the historical kingdom called Amalek, why did the rabbis command

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14. Maimonides, *Guide*, Part I, Ch. 2, pp. 24-25. See also Aryeh Botwinick, *Skepticism, Belief, and the Modern: Maimonides to Nietzsche* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 32-33.

15. A similar interpretation of the Garden of Eden story is found in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Chs. 20, 29, and 35. See Zev Harvey, "The Israelite Kingdom of God According to Hobbes," in *Iyyun* 30 (1981), pp. 27-38.

16. Exodus 17:8-16.

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the Jewish community to remember Amalek throughout all the generations, when the original kingdom had long since been destroyed? Even if a few paltry descendents are left in the world, why should this matter? If the intention in perpetuating the biblical hostility against Amalek is to blot out his name and memory, then a question of reflexivity arises. Normative Judaism postulates it as axiomatic that the Bible endures forever. By incorporating the "blotting out" of the remembrance of Amalek into its text, the Bible guarantees that Amalek never will be forgotten. The Bible's dictum about the "blotting out" of Amalek is reflexively unsustainable in light of the Bible's eternity.

In grappling with these perplexities, the Netziv takes the "blotting out" to refer to Amalek's national mission and collective identity. In identifying this mission, the Netziv takes his cue from Balaam's description of Amalek which refers to Amalek as "the beginning of nations."[17] Again, "beginning" cannot refer to first in power and prestige because Amalek — assessed geopolitically — was never more than a second-rate power. In terms of historical chronology, Amalek also was not the first nation. So, in this context, the Netziv interprets "beginning" to refer to spirit. Amalek constitutes the premier embodiment of anti-monotheistic nationhood. What does it mean to have an anti-monotheistic set of values? It signifies to be committed to inveterate naturalism — to the abolition of mystery and the eradication of uncertainty. It is presumably this attitude that empowers Amalek in its destructive mission against Israel at a time when, in accord with the biblical account, Israel was the object of multiple divine miracles.[18] Amalek's metaphysics denies that there is any phenomenon both inside and outside the self that is not thoroughly permeable and transparent to the light of reason. In a special, but still recognizable sense, it could be said that Amalek is a gnostic whose overwhelming need and desire to make the cosmos answerable to the requirements of reason does not lead him to multiply gods, but to deny God altogether. However, the underlying impulse in the two cases — classical gnosticism and the Amalekite variation — is the same: to make the universe answerable to human reason.

The tower of Babel events now can be read as an Amalekite gnostic denial of God, rather than as a classical gnostic attempt to proliferate Him through His intimate bonding with each of the builders. The builders of the tower of Babel can be seen as promoting a scientistic ideology. They wanted to push God out of the picture by laying claim to a technological mastery that makes the world utterly transparent. Classical Marcionite gnosticism (against which St. Augustine rebelled) rejects the negative-theological focus on God as Creator, because it finds the evil and suffering that abound in the world too jarring with the idea that the world is God's creation. In order to make the concept of divinity compatible with and answerable to the claims of reason, gnosticism posits a God of Redemption,

17. Numbers 24:20.

18. Naphtali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, *Sefer Shemos (Book of Exodus) With the Commentary Ha'Amek Davar* (Jerusalem: El Hamekoroth, 1966), 17:14, p. 149.

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which it juxtaposes to the God of Creation. Both the builders of the tower of Babel and the Amalekites are gnostics in the sense that they believe that the cosmos, nature, and history are permeable to reason, and they seek mastery without the additional postulation of God. Where, in order to rationalize God, Marcionite gnosticism adds a second god to the pantheon of divinities, the gnosticism of the builders of the Tower of Babel and of the Amalekites leads them to a similar need to rationalize God, to take God out of the picture altogether. Marcion abolishes (or at least diminishes) mystery by bifurcating the Godhead and assigning the disparate provinces of creation and redemption to two different gods. The proliferation of divinities is functionally equivalent to the obliteration of divinity. Either way, from a negative-theological perspective, the imperatives of reason have tampered with the penumbra of uncertainty that hovers over the category of God as it hovers over all other concepts. They have dislodged the world (and the phenomena which man seeks to control) from that penumbra and made them susceptible to rational resolution either by rejecting God or by proliferating Him.

The paradox emerges that only negative-theological monism (i.e., a monism that locates skepticism and God on the same ontological plane by identifying analogous problems of reflexivity with regard to the formulation of both positions) can sustain a place for God. Attempts to formulate skepticism coherently confront the same self-defeating prospects as attempts to formulate the principles of monotheism coherently: efforts to sustain an intellectual universe without God founder in much the same way as efforts to sustain an intellectual universe with God. In this crucial sense, negative-theological monism manages to keep the prospect of God alive. In order to emerge as consistent, skeptical doctrine must encompass a reflexive maneuver whereby skeptical critical canons are turned against the tenets of skepticism — forcing them into a recoil and thereby inhibiting their adequate formulation. Analogously, the conceptual removal of the monotheistic God, which renders Him totally unlike anything human, requires some kind of grammatical subject concerning whom the continual divestiture of predicates can take place. Skepticism is a doctrine of radical critique that both presupposes and denies a stable subject (in a grammatical sense): tenets of skepticism. Monotheism is also a doctrine of radical critique that simultaneously presupposes and denies a stable grammatical subject, namely God.

4. In his two essays on the Tower of Babel, Michael Oakeshott[19] provides yet a third approach to locating this biblical narrative within the context of the negative theology vs. gnosticism division. Oakeshott distinguishes between two forms of the moral life: as "a habit of affection and behavior; not a habit of reflective thought, but a habit of affection and conduct" and as "determined, not

19. Oakeshott's first essay (1962) on this topic was included in *Rationalism in Politics*, and is now available in a new and expanded edition (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991). His second essay on the subject appeared in *On History* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999). They will be referred to as "Tower of Babel I" and "Tower of Babel II," respectively.

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by a habit of behavior, but by the reflective application of a moral criterion. It appears in two common varieties: as the self-conscious pursuit of moral ideals, and as the reflective observance of moral rules."[20] Oakeshott favors a morality grounded in tradition and habit, rather than one fashioned out of rules. The Tower of Babel symbolizes how a heightened self-consciousness is ruinous for human life. Since this reading is elaborated in relation to a distinct biblical text, it is fair to say that, according to Oakeshott, the biblical God is in crucial ways denied by an excessive self-consciousness. The paradox emerges that God, who vouchsafes man's ultimate coherence, is only available to man if the quest for ultimate coherence is renounced.[21] It is only in the series of never-ending emotional and intellectual displacements that constitute tradition (tradition as a tissue of endlessly receding displacements) that life finds its highest level of repose and stability.

In the Tower of Babel essays, it makes sense to characterize Oakeshott's own philosophy of religion as agnosticism, rather than atheism. The atheist is primarily self-conscious in his denial of God. By remaining faithful to the question of God's existence and withholding a final answer, the agnostic is able to assimilate God consistently to a not-fully-heightened-self-consciousness. The doctrinal philosophical counterpart to a not-fully-developed-self-consciousness on a psychological plane is agnosticism in religion and a generalized agnosticism elsewhere.

Oakeshott favors those types of state patterned on the ideal of *societas,* whose mode of relation is "formal . . . in terms of rules, not . . . substantive . . . in terms of common action," and is critical of modern states modelled after "enterprise associations" pursuing the goals of *Universitas* whose principle of association is a "common substantive purpose."[22] For Oakeshott, the preferred form of political organization is clearly a liberal state characterized by subordination of the public to the private sphere: the "confirmation of the sovereignty of the *utilitas publica* terminated the civil history of Babel."[23] Subordination of the public to the private sphere is partially designed to ensure primacy of the less-self-conscious over the more-self-conscious in personal and collective life. The instrumentalized relation between the public and the private sphere shifts the major focus of preoccupation from the public sphere (characterized by an intensified self-consciousness) to the private (typified by fragmented self-consciousness,

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20. Oakeshott, "Tower of Babel I," *op. cit.*, pp. 467-472.

21. Inspired by Oakeshott's distinction between a traditionally-grounded morality and a rule-based morality, Haym Soloveitchik situates modern militant Orthodoxy along the latter axis: "Performance is no longer, as in a traditional society, replication of what one has seen, but implementation of what one knows. Seeking to mirror the norm, religious observance is subordinated to it. In a text culture, behavior becomes, inevitably, a function of the ideas it consciously seeks to realize." See Haym Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," in *Tradition*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (1994), p. 72.

22. Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 201, and 204.

23. Oakeshott, "Tower of Babel II," *op. cit.*, p. 197.

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self-consciousness dispersed among a multitude of uncoordinated individuals and groups), and thus serves in a negative, but still cogent way as the post-medieval surrogate for tradition in the medieval world.

In order to reconcile Oakeshott's invocation of rules in his theorizing of *societas* as a formal, rule-oriented organizational entity with his disparagement of a rule-centered morality, two concepts of rules must be distinguished.[24] The moral rules that Oakeshott criticizes are substantive and particularistic. They purport to tell people what to do. By contrast, the rules that characterize *societas* are "framework rules" that stipulate the salient categories centering around the public-private distinction that typify life in liberal, representative democracies. They outline the disparate sets of practices that fall under these divergent categories, without spelling out the content of the substantive rules.

Oakeshott is devastating in his analysis of the moral flaw of the builders of the Tower of Babel: "whether the identity [of the builders] was that of Heaven-Seekers, or merely of Tower-Builders, remained obscure."[25] This captures the problem of seeking Heaven. One can never conclusively validate, even for oneself, that that is what one is really after. The builders' ultimate sin was that, in undertaking to subjugate God and Nature to human ambitions, "they had stumbled upon a life-work and had become the slaves of an ideal."[26] Given the limitations of reason and the untrustworthiness of emotional responses, to act in good faith requires an inversion of the relation between "purposes" and "activities" — between reason and will: "what people call 'ideals' and 'purposes' are never the source of human activity; they are shorthand expressions for the real spring of conduct, which is a disposition to do certain things and a knowledge of how to do them. Human beings do not start from rest and spring into activity only when attracted by a purpose to be achieved. To be alive is to be perpetually active. The purposes one attributes to particular kinds of activity are only abridgements of one's knowledge of how to engage in this or that activity."[27]

Oakeshott's reading of the Tower of Babel story establishes a parallel between a just, well-ordered society and the self. The optimal self is one characterized by a reduced self-consciousness that allows for the play of different impulses and an ongoing process of self-discovery. Ideals and principles are inductive extrapolations out of propensities and abilities codified as a set of moral dicta that sanctify actions falling under them only *ex post facto.* Keeping the level of self-consciousness low enables the Oakeshottian inversion between "purposes" (or "ideals") and "activities" to take place. The former take a back seat to abilities, because the center

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24. See John Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules," in *John Rawls: Collected Papers*, ed. by Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 20-46.

25. Oakeshott, "Tower of Babel II," *op. cit.*, p. 197.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

27. Timothy Fuller, ed., *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 95.

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of gravity for the self is located in what it does, not in how it makes sense of what it does. Making sense of the self always is derivative and *ex post facto*. As for classical Jewish sensibility, for Oakeshott "doing" precedes "knowing."[28]

An additional issue of reflexivity emerges here. In his role as philosopher is not Oakeshott violating his own descriptive-normative principles? In pursuing philosophy — what he calls "experience without arrest"[29] — is he not manifesting the highest degree of self-consciousness? How does one reconcile the metatheory implicit in Oakeshott's practice as philosopher with his explicit theory concerning the efficacy and desirability of a lowered stage of self-consciousness? The most persuasive answer here has to do with the deliverances that the pursuit of philosophical reason — the engagement in "experience without arrest" — vouchsafes. What this pursuit discloses is how even so-called facts constitute low-level theories — how naming has ontological priority over what it names. As Oakeshott puts it: "There can be no absolute distinction between 'fact' and 'theorem.' A fact has no finality and no authority over further adventures in understanding: it is a first and conditionally acceptable understanding of a 'going-on'."[30] The unbounded skepticism that this gives rise to is only sustainable as a generalized agnosticism — a skepticism which incorporates a skepticism of itself. A generalized agnosticism, in turn, restores (to the extent possible) on a discursive level the morality of habit and tradition and the indefinitely diminished self-consciousness which Oakeshott defends on an experiential level.

5. The dream of "Jacob's Ladder" also seems to be emblematic of a negative-theological as opposed to a gnostic sensibility. As he set out from Beersheva on his way to Haran to escape the wrath of his brother Esau, Jacob dreamed: "And behold a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven and behold angels of God going up and down on it."[31] Rashi immediately latches on to what is peculiar in this verse: "It states first ascending and afterwards descending!"[32] The natural sequence of conventionally-conceived angels would be to go down (to accomplish whatever their earthly mission is) and then to go up (to return to their regular abode in heaven). Jacob imagines angels that move in a reverse order — first up and *then* down. This disruption of the angels' natural sequence is suggestive of the negative-theological inversion with regard to celestial matters generally. Since man has no literal grasp of either them or their movements, it is always a matter of angels going up for the sake of coming down. Since man can relate to angels only metaphorically, he inevitably focuses on their downward movements — on their significance for man.

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28. Exodus 24:7.
29. Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933; reprinted 1966), p. 350.
30. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
31. Genesis 28:12.
32. *Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary: Genesis*, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

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6. In Moses' first encounter with Revelation as he tends the flock of his father-in-law Jethro at the mountain of God, Horeb, a phrase occurs whose metaphorical import seems to be distinctly (if not paradigmatically) negative theology. "And the angel of the Eternal appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the *midst of a bush and he saw and behold the bush burned with fire and the bush* was not devoured."[33] The Burning Bush, which is supposed to be the symbolic medium heralding the presence of God, is not extinguished in relation to its source as if to underscore the primacy in divine matters of representational mechanisms over that which they represent. In negative theology, symbols have an opacity and a perdurability which confers on them the status of semi-independent entities that do not fully refer to what they are officially supposed to represent. The Burning Bush is not consumed in relation to God because no metaphor can pierce the divine essence and disclose the element(s) of literalism attached to the notion of God. The Burning Bush serves as a metaphoric stand-in for the endless fertility and insurmountability of metaphors when it comes to speaking about and relating to the monotheistic God.

7. The biblical account of creation insinuates that the creative God is of a negative-theological character. The pervasive roles of speech and naming as instruments for God's Creation run like *leitmotifs* throughout the story of Creation. The prefatory phrases "God says" and "God calls" or "names" appear in relation to each of the six days of Creation. On the seventh day, when God rests (and ceases to create) these terms do not appear. The verb that substitutes for them is "bless." What sort of creation is it in which the creator merely speaks and names? These descriptive epithets conjure up a scene of irrevocable belatedness, where what is occurring is so alien and distant from human understanding that only terms that already bear a derivative trace, that evoke human modes of creating, are being used as metaphoric screens behind which the inscrutableness of the process of creation can be preserved. Human creation takes place by naming, grouping, and classifying. God creates in the same way, not because there is continuity between his mode of creating and that of humans, but because the discontinuity is so overwhelming that the only palliative that will work is a metaphoric extension of the human vocabulary of creation to God. As Hobbes and Nietzsche never tired of exploring and exploiting, the Bible's depiction of God the Creator is already a model of the human capacity to create, which is figured in such a way in order to preserve the sanctity and remoteness of the biblical concept of creation.

The biblical vocabulary of creation encodes not only the human inability to grasp the nature of God, but also the metaphysical implications of such a position. The infinite regress in the explanatory quest in searching for the reasons and causes of things ultimately is blocked by postulating the monotheistic God as First Cause, who bears no resemblance to what He created, and therefore can

33. Exodus 3:2.

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serve as a satisfactory ultimate cause. However, an infinite regress in explanatory quests can be warded off only by postulating as First Cause an entity that is thoroughly unintelligible and unassimilable to regular human conceptual and logical frameworks. This means that in relation to man's desire to rationally penetrate the human world the infinite regress is restored. Multiple discrete objects and phenomena in the world can be comprehended by grouping them under a much more limited number of words and concepts, and by repeatedly grounding them in words and concepts of still higher levels of abstraction and generality, without finding a satisfactory arrest. This suggests that, in the end, words have an ontological primacy over the things they ostensibly group and subsume. There is thus an intimate metaphysical connection between the logical unapproachability of God and identifying creativity with acts of naming. The biblical description of divine creation already presupposes a metaphysically fallen world.

8. The Bible's tests for determining the veracity of prophets subsequent to Moses reflect a negative-theological understanding of the nature of God. The Bible states: "But the prophet who shall presume to speak a word in my name which I have not commanded him to speak or that shall speak in the name of other gods even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart How shall we know the word which the Eternal hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Eternal if the thing follow not nor come to pass that is the thing which the Eternal hath not spoken but the prophet hath spoken presumptuously thou shalt not be afraid of him."[34] The Bible lists only two tests for distinguishing the false from the true prophet. The first has to do with whom the prophet cites as authorizing his message — whether the monotheistic God or "other gods." The other is concerned with whether his forecast is borne out by events.

Thus, the tests for prophecy are all this-worldly in character: the prophetic tradition to which the prophet claims to belong and the efficacy of his predictions in the real world. Given the unbridgeable distance that separates humans from God, it is only by consulting this-worldly phenomena (rather than presumed otherworldly corroborations) that a prophetic mission can be validated. For all practical purposes, the prophet exercises his vocation in this world, and it is only by invoking empirical criteria of these two sorts that his role can be legitimated.[35]

9. An additional reading of Adam and Eve's transgression in the Garden of Eden, partially inspired by the previousy mentioned Maimonidean reading, follows another route to make the point, and thereby reinforces the view that the

34. Deuteronomy 18:20-22.

35. Rashi delineates the scope of these two sets of criteria. When a prophet issues commands in the present, one has to inspect his self-proclaimed pedigree. When he offers prognostications concerning the future, one has to consult results. The most striking aspect of the biblical account of the verification of prophecy is how the word "prophet" is already functioning in its extended metaphoric sense of someone who makes reliable predictions concerning the future, rather than in its strict literal sense of someone who possesses a direct, commanding relation with God.

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biblical God is negative-theological rather than gnostic in character. In the story of Adam and Eve's transgression in eating from the Tree of Knowledge, the relation between negativity and positivity is so radically asymmetrical and so fraught with ambiguity that it ends up prefiguring the relation between descriptions of God and God himself (from a negative-theological perspective). God issues a prohibition to Adam and Eve against partaking of the Tree of Knowledge. They ostensibly know what they are to refrain from doing. However, the question remains what positive configuration of human attributes is either compatible with or supportive of conforming to this prohibition? Here, the Bible remains strategically silent. In pondering this question one becomes aware that sustaining this prohibition is compatible with what look like untold, infinitely imaginable configurations of human attributes and character traits. However, the negative formulation (the prohibition against eating from the Tree of Knowledge) is not translatable into a definitive positive ordering of attributes and traits. There can be many, infinitely diverse selves who still preserve loyalty to the negative prohibition. On a metaphorical level, the Bible thus reinforces the idea central to negative theology that there is an infinite, unbridgeable gap between negative formulations and their positive objects and correlatives.

As long as language was devoid of negative constructions — when everything was formulated in positive terms — one could harbor the illusion that there is unmediated access to an objective world, that words are transparent reflections of what is ineluctably out there. Introducing negativity (the prohibition against eating from the Tree of Knowledge constitutes the first negative construction in the Biblical text) represents the human fall from grace, as it were, because it illustrates beyond hope of reprieve how language everlastingly folds in upon itself without achieving a final resolution of the real. The inability to find an unquestionable positive correlative to a negative prohibition (all versions of this seem subject to revision, expansion, and supersession) means that one is stuck forever within the domain of words, unable to find a secure outlet in some configuration of worldly reality.

The infinity of the distance between negative prohibition and positive translation becomes more dramatically evident when it is realized that even transgressing the negative prohibition is compatible with at least some versions of a positive translation of that prohibition. If violating the negative prohibition is a spur to *Teshuvah* (repentance), then the greater insight into self-limitations — the deepened humility — occasioned by an act of repentance is in a paradoxical, but still fully intelligible way traceable to the negative prohibition. Adam and Eve's transgression in the Garden of Eden falls into this category. Their unfamiliarity with the grammar of negativity makes them ill-equipped to fully appreciate and properly respond to the divine prohibition. The positive translation of a negative prohibition into the paradoxical, but still intelligible state of the penitent transgressor underscores the elusiveness of the boundaries for achieving an appropriate positive

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translation of a negative prohibition. In turn, the elusiveness of those boundaries becomes a metaphor for the underdetermination of words by objects.

10. Yosef Duber, the grandson of Reb Chaim Wolozhoner, and the author of a commentary on *halakhic* themes and *Torah* texts called the *Beit Halevi*, formulates a question that should be most disturbing from the perspective of negative theology: if one follows the principle of *Klal Lo Yasiguhu* — if ostensibly referential God-talk and all attempts at material concretization of God's presence are to be construed metaphorically — in what sense is the building of the *Mishkan* (the sanctuary in the desert) less of a sacrilegious act than the fashioning of the Golden Calf? Do they not both constitute forms of idolatry, an inability to live with the extraordinary tension that monotheism imposes which leads to a reification and sanctification of human handiwork? Duber answers in a spirit that Maimonides (the main theories of negative theology in the medieval world) would have instinctively understood: "Since their essential transgression with the golden calf was that they wanted to rely on their own wisdom — to do in accordance with their own understanding something concerning which they were not commanded — therefore in the building of the sanctuary which came to atone for the golden calf the biblical text states concerning each aspect of their work, 'in accordance with God's command.' The import of this recurring phrase is that even though Bezalel (who was in charge of building the sanctuary) knew how to combine the words through which heaven and earth were created and knew secrets and hidden meanings in his work, nevertheless his whole intention was only to fulfill the command of God. They [Bezalel and his co-workers] only intended to fulfill God's will and commands [as conveyed by the legitimate authority structure of the Jewish nation of their time], not because their own reason dictated that they should do what they did. It was this that atoned for the sin of the Golden Calf."[36] Conforming to the duly-constituted authority structure of the Jewish community in the desert was what legitimated the sanctuary — in contrast to the golden calf.

11. The transgression of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, is qualitatively continuous with the sin of the Golden Calf. At the time of the consecration of the sanctuary in the desert, Nadab and Abihu "offered strange fire before the Eternal, which he commanded them not."[37] In their intoxication with God, Nadab and Abihu embellished the sacrifice that they were asked to perform by placing additional fire on the altar. To the traditionally sanctioned outpourings of emotion toward God, they added their own personally generated and driven outpourings of emotion. Parallel to the case of the Golden Calf, there seems little to choose from between a *Mishkan* and a Golden Calf. Correspondingly, in the case of Nadab and Abihu, very little seems to be at stake between one more or one less placement of fire on the altar. Both biblical events, however, seek to underscore how there cannot be an unmediated relation to the word of God. It is the breaching

36. Yosef Duber, *Beit Halevi* (Warsaw, 1884; reprinted in Israel, 1973), p. 54.
37. Leviticus 10:1.

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of what is postulated as unbridgeable theological distance and tendering the claim to intimacy with and knowledge of God that the Torah finds objectionable. To relate appropriately to God, there is no recourse but to follow what is transmitted by duly acknowledged structures of authority.

12. The transgression of the spies who issued a discouraging report about the prospects of the Jewish nation conquering the land of Canaan also can be construed persuasively in a negative-theological vein: The Jewish community's lack of faith was in the negative-theological God. Monotheistic theorizing eventuates in contradiction. God can be invoked as the ultimate explanatory factor responsible for what takes place in the universe only at the cost of unintelligibility. God's total difference from things human enables Him to serve as the ultimate explanatory factor — but that very difference debars Him from explaining anything in a humanly comprehensible way. Ultimacy is achieved at the cost of explanatory illumination, which drove the quest toward ultimacy in the first place. Instead of functioning as a response to skepticism, the concept of God posts a limit to human rational capacities and, in this crucial sense, institutionalizes skepticism. To remain consistent, the version of skepticism that it institutionalizes must be of the form of a generalized agnosticism, which incorporates skepticism of skepticism into its formulation of the protocols of skepticism. A generalized agnosticism suggests an openness to an indefinitely unfolding future that will help revise perceptions and judgments uttered in the present. While there is no guarantee that the incompleteness of understanding can be remedied conclusively, one can confidently expect over time recastings and revisions that will shift the burden of inconclusiveness elsewhere than where it was first diagnosed.

From this perspective, the transgression of the spies and of that generation that responded so uncritically to their report of impending disaster did not appreciate the extent of the openness of the future. The impregnability that the spies pointed to, e.g., "The cities are fortified and very great,"[38] was taken to be enduring and inalterable, rather than being perceived as subject to the vicissitudes and ravages of time. From the biblical vantage point, the failure of the spies and the community that supported their judgment ultimately constituted a failure of faith. It was not simply lack of faith in the covenantal promise of inheriting the land, but a shallow and distorted appreciation of what that promise was. It merely augured space for interventions that in the end would facilitate conquest and habitation of the land. That promise in no way guaranteed direct access to the land with all barriers removed. All initiatives relating to conquest of the land would have to come from the human side in a climate where the usual murkiness and ambivalence surrounding the signs and portents that orient human initiatives have not been removed.

Theologically speaking, the transgression in the incident of the spies was of a piece with the transgression involved in fashioning the Golden Calf. In both

38. Numbers 13:28.

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cases, there is a rush on the part of the Jewish community in the desert to annul theological distance and to purge ambiguity by reifying the divine presence and trying to make it accountable to human standards of clarity and promptness. The incident of the spies — just like the making and worshiping of the Golden Calf — constitute milestones along the path of the Bible's oblique disclosure of what it means to be a follower and servant of the monotheistic God.

13. There is a remarkable biblical formulation often overlooked by rabbinic commentators: "And the children of Israel shall lay their hands upon the Levites."[39] Here, the Torah refers to the investiture of the Levites to prepare them to perform their holy functions in the Sanctuary. One would have expected the Torah to deploy a vertical image to capture such investiture: that a charismatic spirit descends from heaven and instills the Levites with their special holiness. No such image is to be found. Instead, the Torah depicts a process of horizontal and even circular investiture. Investiture with special holiness comes from other members of the Jewish community (a horizontal motion). What is noteworthy is that it is the very people whom the Levites elevate into various degrees of holiness (through their blessings of the congregation in the Temple, their officiating over and participating in the sacrifices, and in their role as the religious counselors and decision-makers in the community) who become invested with holiness through the very actions of the people whom they help to elevate in holiness. This suggests that for the Torah holiness is a circular process that does not officially begin or end anywhere. It is sustained through the interaction of Levites and ordinary Jews. Holiness is a function of that reciprocity — that mutual interaction. Holiness in Judaism is not something substantive, traceable to any one source. It is known only by its manifestations, by its fruits — which are discernible only in interaction.

In light of this discussion of the political theology of the Torah, the issue of the divine sanction for settlements can be addressed in a new way. Once the theological illusion that God speaks is shed, it becomes clear how the Torah impinges in multiple and conflicting ways on the historical reality of the settlements. On the one hand, it lays out in ample and generous terms the boundaries (which are exceedingly difficult to correlate with contemporary geographical units) of the land that God is bequeathing the Jews.[40] On the other hand, though, the Torah implores man to choose life[41] — and Rabbi Akiva, whom the Talmud itself regards as the chief architect of Rabbinic Judaism,[42] takes the biblical injunction one step further by emphasizing that keeping oneself alive (i.e., not jeopardizing one's own life) constitutes the supreme imperative.[43]

In this context, it is important to note that Rabbi Akiva's support of and

39. Numbers 8:10.
40. Numbers 34:1-15.
41. Deuteronomy 30:19.
42. Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 86a.
43. Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia 62a.

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involvement in Bar-Kokhba's rebellion against the Romans was not a function of a romantic messianism.[44] It seemed rather at the time like an eminently rational move to restore Jewish political independence. Bar-Kokhba's rebellion actually succeeded in establishing an autonomous Jewish state for three years. Apparently, what motivated its leaders was the not unrealistic hope that the Jewish rebellion would serve as a goad to Roman colonies to rebel in a kind of early version of a "domino effect." The ensuing fragmentation of Roman military response would in all likelihood have ensured the success of all the rebellions. Unfortunately, the "domino effect" did not come to pass — the Jewish rebellion was not emulated by other Roman colonies — and the Romans were able to mobilize a large and overwhelming force against the Jews and to crush their independence. Also important to note in discrediting the romantic messianic image projected on Rabbi Akiva is that the revolutionary leader he backed, Bar Kokhba, was known for his military prowess (a purely secular skill), and did not lay claim to any charismatically charged spiritual or intellectual mantle. In fact, the Bar Kokhba episode in Jewish history with Rabbi Akiva's backing and tutelage becomes the paradigm for Maimonides' theorizing King Messiah as a worldly military and political leader whose identity can be fixed retrospectively only on the basis of his military and political success in unifying the Jewish people and restoring peace to their ancestral setting.[45]

As a meta-principle for resolving tensions emerging between its substantive principles, the Torah advocates following the will of the majority.[46] Presumably, this signifies majority rule with due protection of minority rights of members who might constitute future majorities. In the biblical distribution of priorities, ambiguity and choice are inescapable. A proper appreciation of the negative-theological tenor of the biblical text is a precondition for meeting the challenge.

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44. See the ideologically-charged, controversial book by Yehoshafat Harkabi, *The Bar Kokhba Syndrome: Risk and Realism in International Politics*, tr. by Max D. Ticktin, ed. by David Altshuler (Chappaqua, NY: Rossel Books, 1983).

45. *The Code of Maimonides: Book XIV: The Book of Judges*, "Laws of Kings and Their Wars," Chs. 11-12.

46. Exodus 23:2.

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Italy: Between Bureaucratic Power and Democratic Legitimacy

Teodoro Klitsche de la Grange

For more than a year, Italy has had a stable Center-Right government, with two new characteristics: 1) a large political majority (almost 60% in Parliament and over 55% in the Senate); and 2) the inclusion in the governing coalition of the party once nostalgic for fascism, which had resulted in its ostracism by the republican regime from 1946 to 1994. In order to understand these radically new developments and what the Berlusconi government proposes, it is necessary to retrace the crisis of the old Italian "regime of parties" and of the constitutional predicament.

I

To explain the crisis and the rapid collapse (1992-1994) of the old partitocracy centered on two major parties, Christian Democracy and the Italian Communist Party, it is necessary to understand the basis of its legitimacy. The regime based on the primacy of parties (the so-called "First Republic") fell because of a legitimacy deficit. Since WWII, the political system has never enjoyed full legitimacy, but only what Guglielmo Ferrero has called "semi-legitimacy." Several features make this clear. First of all, there was limited popular consensus. This state of affairs has dogged the regime from the very beginning, unlike almost all other liberal-democratic states, where consensus to constituted power, even if in the alternation of two or more parties (or coalition of parties), defines the political system. In these states, supporters of anti-systemic forces are limited to small minorities, and there is a broad consensus — almost plebescitary — whether the government is democratic or republican, Tory or Labour. Precisely the opposite has obtained in Italy.

The Italian Republic was born out of a referendum, choosing between monarchy or republic. Independently of the way the quorum was set and the various charges of electoral fraud, the fact remains that the republic prevailed with a very modest majority of 53%. This slim consensus should have called for respect for the democratic principle of legitimacy, in order to provide a stable foundation for the new regime. The opposite happened. According to reports, when a leader of the Constitutional Assembly, the socialist Pietro Nenni, was asked to legitimate the Constitution about to be approved by the Assembly with a referendum, he answered that it was not wise, since there was the risk that the citizens might reject it. During the 1950s, the parties favoring the liberal-democratic system could only

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count on barely over 50% of the votes. In fact, in the 1953 election, they even missed that margin by a few votes. This was remedied by the progressive cooptation of socialists within the government, so that by the 1960s the consensus to democratic parties grew to almost 60%. The subsequent evolution of the Italian Communist Party brought it ever closer to the government, thus depriving it of its designation as an anti-system party.

Yet, precisely during these years, a terroristic phenomenon such as the Red Brigades, enjoying only a slim following, plunged the government into a serious crisis. The weakness of a semi-legitimate state became clear once again, and was articulated, in a synthetic but efficient way, by the slogan: "neither with the State nor with the Red Brigades." A few years later, after eliminating terrorism at the price of limiting freedom, consensus for the system did not improve. This can be seen by electoral results as well as by the outcome of various referenda. During the first 15 years after the institutionalization of referenda (after 1970), the majority always accepted laws approved by Parliament or still on the books; beginning in the second half of the 1980s, laws proposed by the ruling classes were rejected. The subsequent phenomenon of the frequent, even if not constant success of the "party of abstention" to referenda (i.e., the failure to reach a minimum quorum of voters), confirmed the distance between the country and the political class.

The 1990s opened with two important events: the approval of the Segni referendum, and the rise of the Northern League, which challenged national unity. Already in the 1991 regional elections, the federalist-secessionist movement gained considerable support. In subsequent national elections, the *pentapartito*, i.e., the coalition of the definitely democratic parties, could gain the support of only 52% of the voters. A little over a month before these elections, the Milan police arrested a politician, and eventually many more. The "juridical revolution" that issued the indictments was in harmony with growing popular discontent.

Despite the rapid collapse of the *pentapartito* and the previous, much more important collapse of Soviet communism, the rejection of the old system was not followed by any agreement as to what to put in its place. In the 1996 elections, the coalition of parties dominated by post-communists (the "Olive") gained only a meagre 46% of the votes, which subsequently decreased to 42% when proportionality was factored in. Except for the elections for the second republican legislature, for the first time the government had no parliamentary majority reflecting the composition of the electoral body. Now it was in the hands of a stronger minority, which held more seats in Parliament only because the electoral majority (the "Liberty Pole" and the "Northern League") was divided. This state of affairs did not prevent the minoritarian government from governing and the divided majority from appointing the President of the Chamber of Deputies. The debate concerning constitutional reforms, the clash between conservatives (almost all of them connected with the "Olive") and reformers (primarily belonging to the opposition) led to failure to implement any reform. The fact that most

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Italians (even if in a confused way) desired significant changes did not constitute a reason for reconsidering certain positions. Thus, the gap between popular will and ruling class behavior became even wider than it was during the "First Republic."

II

In 1992 some juridical bodies, which in Italy are entrusted with issuing indictments, began to focus on prosecuting crimes committed by politicians belonging almost exclusively to the governing parties (socialists, liberals, Catholics). This was the last straw contributing to the collapse of the old system. The so-called "juridical revolution" exemplifies both the nature of the Italian political system and its defects. It also explains the Center-Right's proposals to resolve them.

Analyses of political and constitutional systems usually focus on relations between the electoral bodies and those they elect, on the various institutions (the legislature, the administration, local entities), and on relations between parties and their electorate. The focus is usually on power and those who exercise it. Excluding part of those who hold it, even if it is not within the constitutional framework, leads to partial and therefore incomplete, if not misleading, accounts. This is what often happens in analyses of Italy, where bureaucratic power determines social behavior and articulates particular interests and issues. Thus, it functions as the kind of concrete political subject it was never meant to be.

This is particularly important in a liberal state like Italy, whose juridical development is rather different from that of Anglo-Saxon countries — especially in terms the role played by administration and the power it exercises, as in the recruiting and handling of bureaucratic personnel. Selection procedures, status (with relative guarantees of stability), career progression, and professionalism make bureaucratic bodies more similar to judges in the France of the *ancien régime* than to their contemporaries in the US, where the discretionary power of the executive, the election even of judges and district attorneys, makes them more accountable to popular will. This state of affairs[1] diminishes their ability to articulate their particular interests and issues, whereas the Italian bureaucracy's mode of

1. This is a problem well-known to political theorists. From Sieyès to Marx, from the Italian "Macchiavellians" such as Mosca and Pareto to rational choice theorists, not to mention Max Weber, bureaucratic power has been dealt with extensively, but there have not been too many ideas concerning how to reign it in. The most pregnant pages in this respect may have been written by the young Marx, who, among other things, considered "the spirit of the bureaucracy" to be the "formal spirit of the state." Thus, it was the categorical imperative of the "formal spirit of the state" or the state's real lack of spirituality. The bureaucracy pretends to be the state's ultimate aim. Because the bureaucracy turns its "formal" objectives into its contents, it runs everywhere into conflict with "real" objectives. Thus, it is forced to mistake the form for its content, and the content for its form. State objectives turn into bureaucratic objectives, or bureaucratic objectives into state objectives. Marx goes on: "For what regards the bureaucrat as an individual, the state objective becomes his private objective, a *chase after higher position*, a *career*." See Karl Marx, *Critica della filosofia hegeliana del diritto pubblico*, ed. by Umberto Cerroni (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1983), pp. 68-69.

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recruitment through competition, its guarantees and its status promote group interests, and its indirect relation to popular will renders it unaccountable to anyone.

Following the crisis of the political system and the dissolution of old parties (to which the juridical bureaucracy made a considerable contribution), bureaucratic bodies acquired new powers by substituting for ordinary political power — a logical procedure, given the central character of such an organ in a parliamentary Republic.[2] The presence of unelected career bureaucrats at the highest levels of government implies a clear break with that rule, and even more with the principle of popular sovereignty, given the impossibility of relating even indirectly political choices to popular will. Up to the May 2001 elections, both the President of the Republic and that of Council of Ministers (the two most important political positions) had not been appointed by Parliament. In fact, the former had never been elected to any position during his lifetime. This is an unprecedented, emblematic situation.

III

From the viewpoint of the party system, the dissolution of democratic parties has had strange consequences in Italy — something altogether exceptional with respect to other Western states. It is the only country which, after the collapse of Soviet communism, has seen national communist sympathizers take over the government despite the fact that their ideas had just been relegated to the historical dustbin.[3] Because of this, and not just out of conformism, most of the Left political personnel has rewrapped itself in liberal clothes. With the losers forced, by necessity, to adopt to the winners' ideas, this new state of affairs has led to a spiritual desert. In the communist and Leninist traditions, there is hardly any

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2. This can be readily seen, beginning in 1993, in the appointment of public administrators to important institutional roles: from the Presidency of the Republic to that of Parliament, from the Foreign Ministry to the Treasury, etc. This has changed the unwritten rule whereby earlier all those holding such positions were from Parliament. According to Max Weber, this is altogether atypical. If a "functionary" is elected, "he is no longer a purely bureaucratic figure," because he is responsible to those who are below him rather than above. Yet, Weber adds that, if the centralized administration is directed by an "honorary" functionary (a Minister) who is not a bureaucrat, this guarantees the political direction and therefore the execution of democratic "directives," such as accountability to the electorate. Conversely, all of this becomes problematic where the degree of autonomy of the bureaucracy is such that it need not be accountable to those below, and inadequately or not at all to those above. To a large extent, bureaucratic power becomes self-referential. Cf. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1978), Vol. I, pp. 212ff., and "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, tr. and ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 77-128.

3. The French case is different; and the French Communist Party has always held a subordinate governmental role.

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respect for popular will: a party born out of "professional revolutionaries," i.e., enlightened oligarchs, is destined to guide the masses rather than to follow them.

From another viewpoint, the bureaucratic character of mass European socialist parties (already documented almost a century ago by Robert Michels), and the managerial character of the social-democratic welfare state fit well with the bureaucracy's worldview, so that the Center-Left coalition in Italy has ended up as a "federation of political, administrative, and trade-union bureaucracies" in a context in which, given the success of neo-liberalism in the US and Great Britain, the welfare state appears more and more as a waster of resources and a mediocre manager of collective goods and services. This is why the Center-Left program, which recycled, with minor modifications, old post-war policies, was — and is — hated by most of the electorate. The latter demands loosening excessive regulations and lower taxes. In a nutshell, less state and more market. These political demands clash with the ideas of the post-communists (and their allies) and with bureaucratic interests.

IV

The outcome of the May 13, 2001 elections has "mended the rip" between legality and legitimacy that developed after the 1996 political elections. The government now consists of a political majority corresponding to the electoral majority, and the President of the Parliamentary Council is the leader of the winning coalition. It is unlikely that, given the size and unity of the majority, it could be substituted through party maneuvers — as happened in the last legislature, when three different leaders of the winning coalition succeeded each other. Thus, Italy may finally have stable, responsible governments, with the plebiscitary support of the electoral body, and with a party system of two alternative and contraposed coalitions — a regime similar to that of other liberal-democratic states. The problems faced by the new majority are: 1) to translate into constitutional norms the electoral modifications; 2) to redimension the power of bureaucracies, which are likely to oppose the new government, both for reasons of self-interest and because the bureaucracy remains tied to the old regime and the Center-Left coalition; and 3) to restore an equilibrium among the state, the bureaucratic apparatus, and civil society, by deregulating, simplifying legislation, and reducing taxes. All of this threatens the power of bureaucrats, and of the new government's opponents.

V

This new government has timidly begun to implement such a program, although it does not have the power of an American or a French President (or administration). As for the decisive point, i.e., wholesale constitutional reform, nothing has been done yet, and the government seems to want to stay put, remaining satisfied with legislative innovations. As for deregulation, it is essential to allow the government to rationalize the rusty, confused, and often illiberal

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proliferation of laws. Up to now, no such power has been granted the government, despite President Berlusconi's promise during the electoral campaign that he would behave "like Napoleon or Justinian" in simplifying legislation. There has been some liberalization and tax reduction, but there is a stubborn resistance from trade unions, primarily post-communist ones, to limit job security.

A separate problem is the bureaucracy, especially the judiciary, which is openly hostile to proposed reforms — even minor ones already implemented. What is at stake is "the separation of careers" between investigating functionaries (*pubblici accusatori*) and judges, and the introduction of selective obstacles to automatic career progression. These are institutions altogether unknown in the US, where there is no "career" (with automatic promotion from lower to higher positions, with relative pay raises), and the office of the district attorney is independent of the judiciary. Rather, the violent reaction already planned by judicial trade unions calls for a reconsideration of the relation between the bureaucracy and the political class within a constitutional framework.

VI

Many modern states have passed through long periods of governmental instability, with particular administrations lasting less than a year — as was the case with France during the Third and Fourth Republics, or with Italy after 1946. In such situations, the relative stability enjoyed by the civil service was, in a sense, a factor buffering political instability. If, as in the US, the highest public authorities were tied through a fiduciary relation with the President (whose actual mandate is 4 years), these states would have been thrown into profound and generalized administrative instability as a result of the almost yearly changes of political leadership in such states. In other words, this is the main positive aspect of a system whose negative features are, as already indicated, a) the presence of bodies of public functionaries with their own particular interests, and b) the only partial accountability of bureaucracies to democratic principles. As Weber pointed out, at the top of bureaucratic organizations in democracies there is always a politician who guarantees (or should guarantee) the conformity of the behavior of the public functionaries (with respect to directives from below) and who is accountable to the electoral body. But if there is not much difference between political and bureaucratic authorities regarding duration and stability, everything is likely to function better by reserving to political power the role of direction and control, thus establishing an equilibrium between political and bureaucratic "authorities." If, instead, this divergence remains, as in Italy, and in favor of bureaucratic authority, the distribution of power favors the functionaries.[4] This

4. Thus, recent polemics concerning the rerplacement of the heads of RAI (Italian public telecommunications) has already triggered street demonstrations on the part of the opposition (previously in the majority). In Italy, changes of government are not ordinarily followed by changes in the personnel running public authorities — at least not immediately.

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implies a relative limitation of democracy, because the total substitution of the governing body (with the electoral victory of the opposition) does not affect some positions (judgeships, independent authorities, etc.) and their roles.

The novelty of a stable government reinforced by proper constitutional innovations, such as direct election of the president, and the formation of the government under his direction without parliamentary ratification, would reduce the power of the bureaucracy without reducing institutional guarantees[5] and, most of all, perennial privileges. What remains, then (and primarily) are only shortcomings, two of which merit mention: polycracy and the inability of bureaucratic power to generate its own legitimacy. A polycratic arrangement based primarily on a bureaucratic foundation does not safeguard individual freedoms or social and communitarian autonomies, which are entrusted to other arrangements, such as federalism or the separation of powers (in Montesquieu's sense). Conversely, it has a debilitating impact on political unity and, even more, on the public ministries' accountability to the public. This is because, first of all, in a federal system such as the US, it has the function of expressing public decisions on the part of the powers chosen by communities and it is responsible to them. In Italy, its role is simply to dispense tasks and jurisdictions to unaccountable functionaries selected by the administration.

As already indicated, here the functionaries' position ends up looking more like that of their counterpart under the *ancien régime* (without even the honor of having to pay for it) than that of the administrators of a community in a federal and democratic system. Bureaucratic guarantees turn out to be, at most, the tutelage of a garden to be cultivated, without having to account to the owners. They end up protecting the bodies of functionaries from popular will, both directly, as is often the case, and indirectly, through elected politicians. Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, a polycratic arrangement turns out to be ungovernable: there is a loss of unity. While in a liberal-democratic and even federal arrangement, as in the US, the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary come together in the fact that only one (majoritarian) power — that of the electoral body — chooses directly or indirectly the candidates to public roles, in a system such as the Italian one, the three "powers" do not come together. One is totally independent (the judiciary), and another partly so (the executive). This tends to weaken, if not to dissolve political unity (each gardener or organization of gardeners goes its own way), in addition to having consequences over the equality of political rights and of the treatment of citizens.

To conclude this brief excursus concerning the most evident traits of the present Italian constitutional predicament, it should be said that the bureaucracy seems unable to generate any trust (other than the most modest) in its own legitimacy. While forms of government founded on "ordinary" principles of legitimacy

5. See Carl Schmitt, *Verfassungslehre* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1954), p. 170.

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(from the democratic, to the monarchical, to the theocratic) often measure their duration in centuries, there is no state in which the bureaucracy has ever taken power that has lasted more than one or two decades. On the whole, governments of the kind (such as military dictatorships) last a few years, after which they yield power to ruling classes sharing the citizens' principle of legitimacy. What helps explain this is the fact that the common trait of all concepts of legitimacy is that, as a relation between citizens and authority, they focus on leadership. In a theocratic framework such as the Catholic Church, what is legitimate is first of all the Pope; in a monarchy, the king; in democracy, representative power (the head of state and parliament). No one has ever associated legitimacy with the *body*, rather than the *head* of public power, i.e., with the structure serving the public. By nature, bureaucracy is a "serving" and "intermediary" power. As such, it cannot perform a directing role, but only of one of service and support of sovereign and legitimate authority.

VII

The new governing coalition wants to implement reforms through the introduction of a presidential system and the reduction of regulations, ties, and powers affecting society. This amounts to moving Italy closer to the US model. Actually, the governing coalition (and most citizens) wishes to be like the US, in the sense of regaining space both for popular will and individual freedom[6]: to be a liberal democracy rather than a vaguely socialist bureaucracy. This is what is at stake. It is a result of history and of a constitutional predicament that Italians want to change: weak governments, the bypassing of popular will, unaccountable and invasive bureaucracies. This is the legacy of the old system. Whether it is possible, given strong resistance and the government's timidity, is unclear. But, Berlusconi's coalition is the most reformist coalition that has come to power in the last half century: for Italy, to realize even half of his program would amount almost to a revolutionary change.

6. For an interesting book, which argues for Italy to adopt the fundamental American principles and institutions, see Giulio Savelli, *Una costituzione "americana"* (Rome: Societa Aperta Edizioni, 1997). In the past a publisher for the Far Left, Savelli has become a member of the Center-Right majority.

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Plato's Republic: *A Tale of Two Cities*

Donald C. Hodges and Christopher A. Pynes

London and Paris were the two cities in Charles Dickens' novel. Unlike Dickens, Plato presents two nameless cities that are rough facsimiles of real ones. To give names to each, the first will be called Walden, after Thoreau's experiment in simple and healthy living in harmony with nature and his fellowman, and the second *Vanity Fair*, after Thackeray's novel about the corrupting influence of luxury.

The first city is what might be called self-ordering. It has no need of government, because it is naturally well-ordered. The second city evolves out of the first, but is disorderly and therefore requires a set of ordering principles if men are to live in harmony. The thorny issue is not whether or not life in Walden is preferable to life in Vanity Fair — Plato leaves no doubt on this question concerning the two real cities — but whether it is preferable to Plato's imaginary remodeling of it in his fictional republic of guardians.

So presented, the fundamental choice in *Republic* is between a real city in which health and peace abound, and an ideal city designed to overcome the vices of an unhealthy and corrupt one. Since in Plato's dialogues Socrates is the supreme exemplar of a simple and healthy life, why would he have preferred a reform of Vanity Fair to the original Walden? With his uncommon dose of common sense, why would he have settled for a fictional set of reforms that might never be implemented? Where was one to find the missing guardians, not to mention a philosopher-king? The fact that Plato gave up the quest in his later dialogue, *Statesman*, underscores the illusory nature of his proposed reforms.

In a recent article, Catherine Pickstock goes to great lengths to provide what she calls "the principles of order in the Platonic City."[1] She wants to eliminate the dualistic understanding of both Plato's work and the dualistic construals of the Platonizing elements in early Christian thought, to modify the black and white contrast between Plato and Aristotle, and to qualify the joint analytic and postmodern readings of Plato — presumably toward a better understanding of the Platonic City. But one is hard pressed to understand the relevance of these concerns to her main objective. If one is going to provide an understanding of the Platonic City in its fictional formulation in *Republic*, how it is ordered and the principle of such ordering, then one should be concerned with clarifying the differences between Plato and

1. Catherine Pickstock, "Justice and Prudence: Principles of Order in the Platonic City," in *Telos* 119 (Spring 2001), pp. 3-17.

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Socrates, and not the differences between Plato and Aristotle.

Pickstock takes too much for granted, namely, the existence of a single and uniform Platonic City. The fact that there is a twenty-year lag or more between the Platonic City presented in *Republic* and the one in *Laws* should be enough to throw suspicion on this claim. The further fact that Plato no longer defines justice in terms of his original guardians, but has given up the search for them in *Statesman*, composed roughly halfway between *Republic* and *Laws*, reinforces the point that *Republic* is not Plato's last word regarding the fictional city.

Plato presents two cities in *Republic*. Since the first one is summarily dismissed, it is generally assumed that the second one is the ideal city. Yet, historical evidence strongly suggests that Socrates' preferred republic was the first, not the second. Did Plato disagree with Socrates on this crucial issue? The text of *Republic* provides no clear answer. So, to be fair to the text, one is compelled to take issue with Pickstock's reading.

Pickstock takes *Republic* as her starting point for the Platonic City, and this is a natural place to begin. In her analysis of justice and prudence as the principles of order in the Platonic City, she relies heavily on both *Phaedrus* and *Laws*. This is where her Platonic thesis comes apart, because there is tension between the cities presented in *Republic* and in the later Platonic dialogues. Socrates does not even appear in *Laws*. This discrepancy between the cities can be explained while working for a different aim: Who was Socrates?

In the quest for the historical Socrates, one should be careful not to confuse Plato with the principal character of his dialogues. As a piece of philosophical fiction, *Republic* has been interpreted as if Plato spoke through the mouth of Socrates. But what is the evidence for this supposed identity? To compound the difficulty, Xenophon depicts a different Socrates from that of Plato. So which is correct? A renewed scrutiny of *Republic* may provide the answer.

There is an implicit distinction, for example, between Socrates' depiction of communism in a healthy and uncorrupted city, and in a sequel to that city that is sick and corrupt so that the guardians are needed. Glaucon claims that Socrates' communism is fit only for a "society of pigs." Ironically, the communism Socrates reserved for corrupt cities is what Plato scholars depict as "ideal."

That is a mistake following from, first, misreading Book II of *Republic* and, second, an overly narrow rendering of the meaning of the word communism. Both mistakes, inclusive of a third one based on a confusion of Socrates' republic with Plato's presumably best and second-best city, began with Aristotle and have been around ever since.

Arguments Against the Second City

There are three basic arguments against taking Vanity Fair as the ideal city Socrates presents in *Republic*. The first and fundamental one might be called the *argument from sickness*. Socrates says to Glaucon, "the true city, in my opinion,

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is the one we've described, the healthy one, as it were. But let us study a city with a fever, if that is what you want."[2] The healthy city is no longer enough to satisfy luxurious desires, so Socrates needs a sick city to provide the goods Glaucon requests. A fever is surely the sign of sickness if anything is, and an ideal city cannot be sick. So, Vanity Fair cannot be Socrates' ideal, but only Glaucon's, in order to quench his feverish desire for luxuries.

In the same vein, Daniel Dombrowski[3] provides two cases of lexical ambiguity (puns) that support both the idea that Socrates was a vegetarian and that the first city — a city of pigs — is the ideal city *Republic* sets out to find. The first case of ambiguity is οπσοσ, which can mean either cooked meats and fish or seasonings, sauces, and relishes. The second involves τραγεμα, which can mean sweetmeats or dried fruits and desserts. These ambiguities show how Glaucon's insistence on luxury items (including flesh from "many more cattle") leads Socrates from the first healthy city to the second feverish city. This is not where his ideal city resides, and everything beyond the first city is imbued with the sicknesses that animal consumption brings: war, disease, and the need for "noble lies."

The second city is sick in being corrupted by both riches and poverty. "The former make for luxury, idleness, and revolution; the latter for slavishness, bad work, and revolution as well." This is because the city is divided against itself and cannot stand. Rather than one city, says Socrates, "it consists of two cities at war with one another, that of the poor and that of the rich."[4]

The second argument might be called the *argument from irony*. Leo Strauss pushes this line of reasoning in several places.[5] He says, "it is one of Socrates' peculiarities that he was a master of irony . . . to speak through the mouth of a man who is notorious for his irony seems to be tantamount to not asserting anything." Now the crucial question arises: if Socrates is ironic in his description of the ideal city, then of which city is the irony intended — Walden or Vanity Fair? Evidence seems stronger for the second city. First, Socrates lived in a manner consistent with the first city he described; in this case, deeds speak louder than reported utterances. Second, as the sickness argument states, Socrates claims Walden as his own. It is one of the rare instances where Socrates puts forth a positive doctrine. Thus, Vanity Fair is the victim of Socratic irony, making it less than ideal.

The third argument might be called the *argument from plausibility*. Despite its fictional reforms, the second city is built on shifting sands. Philosophers do not want to rule because, as thinkers, it goes against their grain. Communism is

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2. Plato, *Republic*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. by John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 372e-373b.

3. Daniel A. Dombrowski, "Two Vegetarian Puns at *Republic* 372," in *Ancient Philosophy*, No. 9.

4. Plato, *Republic*, *op. cit.*, 422a, 423b.

5. Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes* (New York: Basic Books, 1966); and *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1964), pp. 50-51.

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something guardian-warriors would not accept for long. When do those in power not use it for their own benefit? Where is the joy of raising a family without one's own children? The city is brought about by the desire for luxuries, but not everyone can enjoy them. The point behind loving everyone by not knowing who are one's children is a canard. Familial love is natural, and love of others is an outgrowth of this love. When the family is denied, the city is truly feverish and in trouble.

Harry Neumann faults both Glaucon and Thrasymachus for leading Socrates into formulating a second ideal city, because the city of pigs is not sufficient for luxurious living. Because art or tekhné arises out of a desire for luxuries, perfection (the ideal city) in a sense arises from imperfect desires and, accordingly, the philosopher-king's ability to rule is in some sense tainted. The philosopher-king's rule cannot be imperfect, because his rule is guided by absolute knowledge of the Good. However, a denial of such absolute knowledge seems more probable, as pointed out by Aristotle and others. "If that [inability to know the Good] were true, then the Republic would be a tyranny, governed by unscrupulous men armed with a private police force (the guardian-warriors) to suppress all opposition to the 'royal [noble] lies'."[6] People are ruled not by knowledge, but by faith in the guardian-warriors and philosopher-kings. This cannot be the ideal state of either man or the body politic. Unstable in its communism and implausible in its philosopher-king's absolute knowledge of the Good, the second city is far from ideal.

Where does Plato stand on the health of the second city? That he agreed in principle with Socrates' depiction of a healthy city — notwithstanding brother Glaucon's slur that Socrates' city is fit for pigs — is evident from his description of a healthy city in Book V of *Laws*. The healthy city becomes the ideal but, as in *Republic*, Socrates goes on to discuss a second city. As he puts it, "the right procedure is to describe not only the ideal society but the second and third best too, and then leave it to anyone in charge of founding a community to make a choice between them." The key to the ideal society is the old saying: "friends' property is genuinely shared." This principle should be put into practice throughout the entire city. Ideally, it would include "a community of wives, children, and all property." Private property will have been "by hook or by crook completely eliminated from life." Ideally, everybody will "see and hear and act in concert." Everybody will feel pleasure and pain at the same things, they will all "praise and blame with unanimity." The laws will impose the greatest possible unity in the city — there cannot be a "better or truer criterion of an absolutely perfect law than that." This ideal should always be kept in view in an effort to establish or find a city that most nearly resembles it."[7]

As for the second-best city, the citizens must make a distribution of land and houses in such a way that they all receive an equal share. The number of plots

6. Harry Neumann, "Plato's Republic: Utopia or Dystopia?" in *The Modern Schoolman*, Vol. 44 (May 1967).

7. Plato, *Laws*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, *op. cit.*, 739a.

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and hearths established by the initial distribution "must always remain the same." The way to insure this is for each recipient to leave his holding to only one heir — his favorite son. "As for the other children...the head of the family should marry off the females." The males will be put up for adoption to those citizens who lack children of their own. The highest appointed official will investigate difficult cases. "He will decide what is to be done with the surpluses or deficiencies, and will do his best to discover a device to keep the number of households down to 5040." If too many children are being born, there will be measures to check propagation. If not enough children are being born, a high birth rate will be encouraged or the surplus population will be used to establish colonies elsewhere. Under no conditions will the upper limits of one's property be extended. And it will be against the law to buy and sell holdings among citizens. There will be no need or opportunity for anyone to engage in commerce: "no private person shall be allowed to possess any gold or silver, but only coinage for day-to-day use." The only people that will work for money will be slaves and foreigners. To discourage trade, the local currency must be valueless for the rest of mankind. Needless to say, "there must be no lending at interest." In short, "virtue and great wealth are quite incompatible...to be extremely virtuous and exceptionally rich at the same time is absolutely out of the question."[8]

It may be protested that this second-best city is a far cry from communism, because of parcelization, the private property of land and houses, and the injunction that citizens "must not farm in common, which is a practice too demanding for those born and bred and educated as ours are."[9] Although each receives a parcel of land and a house, both should be regarded as the "common possession of the entire state." But regarding it as a common possession does not make it so.

One should not be misled by the word "communism" into believing that its meaning is reducible to the ownership of property in common. Otherwise, there would be no way of distinguishing it from the rival ideology of "socialism." On careful inspection, what is called a "community of goods or communism" can take different forms. For example: (1) land and tools and other means of production including a house owned in private, but produce owned in common or distributed to each; (2) land owned in private but parceled out in equal plots, while its products are owned in common and distributed to each in equal amounts; (3) means of production as well as consumption owned in common; (4) everything owned in common. So conceived, Plato's second-best city qualifies as communist. It also illustrates Karl Marx's defining principle of communism, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs"[10]— a principle applicable under each of the above arrangements.

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8. *Ibid.*, 740a-743b.
9. *Ibid.*, 740a.
10. Karl Marx,"Critique of the Gotha Program" in, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 531.

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Arguments for the First City

There are two non-Platonic arguments for taking Walden as Socrates' ideal, the *argument from health* and the *argument from frugality*.

In the quest for the historical Socrates, Xenophon's *Memorabilia* is not only an indispensable supplement to Plato's portrait in *Republic*; it is also more credible. Based on conversations learned at second hand, Plato makes use of Socrates for a particular philosophical purpose that may or may not have been Socrates' own. A personal friend of Socrates, rather than a mere acquaintance in the case of Plato, Xenophon reports on Socrates' deeds as well as words and on his life as a whole. Health was a constant preoccupation for Socrates. Says Xenophon, he "turned his companions toward attending to their health by learning from those who know," so that each might learn "which food or which drink or what sort of labor was to his advantage and how he might live most healthfully."[11] One looks in vain for a comparable assessment of Socrates in Plato's dialogues.

Plato claims to have been present only once at the Socratic conversations he reports in *Apology*, where he says he was present at Socrates' trial. Xenophon was present on various occasions. As Xenophon presents his friend, Socrates "was so frugal that I do not know if anyone could work so little as not to take in what was enough for Socrates."[12] Thanks to abstinence in the desire for pleasure and the "good things of life," Socrates tried to live as simply as is humanly possible. Rather than wisdom and courage, which he exhibited in uncommon doses, it was frugality or temperance that defined his philosophy of life. Hence, his invocation of a savior, the ideal man capable of resisting not only his stomach, but also the craving for other pleasures. "Ought not every man, believing that continence is the foundation of virtue, be equipped with this first?"[13] At the same time: "He displayed himself to be still more continent in his deeds than in his speeches; for he overpowered not only the pleasures that come through the bodies but also the pleasure that comes through wealth."[14]

How did this philosophy of life strike his critics? Antiphon the sophist said: "You live . . . a way of life that no slave would abide from a master. You eat and drink the poorest food and drink, you wear a cloak that is not only poor but the same one during summer and winter, and you are continuously without shoes or tunic." Socrates answered: "You seem, Antiphon, like one who thinks that happiness is luxury and extravagance. But I, for my part, hold that to need nothing is divine."[15] Thus, according to Socrates reported arguments in support of frugality, "he turned his companions toward training themselves to be continent in their

11. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, tr. by Amy L. Bonnette (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 4:7:9.
12. *Ibid.*, 1:3:5.
13. *Ibid.*, 1:5:4.
14. *Ibid.*, 1:5:6.
15. *Ibid.*, 1:6:2,10.

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desire for meat and drink, and in regard to lust, sleep, cold, heat, and labor."[16]

Now, which of Socrates two cities in Plato's *Republic* typifies frugality? Not Plato's ideal city, but rather Socrates' city of people who live like pigs. To this may be added the controlling virtues in Socrates city based on frugality. Besides temperance or self-control, wisdom is needed to assess the feverish pursuit of luxuries by producers enslaved by appetites, the barracks life of Plato's philosopher-kings, and the training of the guardian-warriors. They are the medicine for which the city of pigs has no need, because its citizens are free of sickness, fear, luxuries, and war.

Aristophones also spoke with Socrates. Although *The Clouds* is a satire at the philosopher's expense, the comedy highlights Socrates' continence, self-sufficiency, and asceticism — qualities of character admired by others if not by Aristophanes. However, one learns less about the historical Socrates from this early play than from Aristophanes' later play, the *Assembly of Women*, performed several years after Socrates' death. The play is crucial for questioning Plato's portrait of Socrates in *Republic*. In his satire on communism, Aristophanes does not copy Plato; instead "Plato had the *Assembly of Women* in mind when he wrote the fifth book of *Republic*." Such is the view accepted by Strauss among others. For *Republic* to have preceded the *Assembly of Women*, Plato would have been only thirty-five when he wrote *Republic*, which is highly improbable.[17]

But it is not in dealing with property, women, and children in common that suggests how Plato responded to the play. Plato's communism departs radically from that of Praxagoras, the play's hero. In *Republic*, communism is reserved for the philosopher-kings and guardian-warriors — a social arrangement modeled on the Spartan example of stamping out factions and preserving solidarity within the ruling stratum and its auxiliaries. In sharp contrast to Plato's communism of, by, and for the elites, Praxagoras' communism is for the benefit of the nonelites and women in particular.[18] Rather than an aristocratic arrangement, it is a profoundly democratic one.

Strauss concurs that *Republic* is a response to Aristophanes' work. He cites as evidence the stumbling blocks to Socrates' supposedly ideal city, *viz.*, the equal treatment of women and families in common. He also questions whether this presumed ideal city could exist, because of the contradiction of a philosopher ruling when it is not his intended role. In effect, he concludes that Plato's second city is not Socrates' ideal one.

Considering that neither Xephonon nor Aristophanes say anything about Socrates' communism as depicted by Plato, Socrates' presumed ideal city may have been contrived. Furthermore, considering Socrates' frugality and continence,

16. *Ibid.*, 2:1:1.

17. Robert Mayhew, Introduction to Xenophon, *Assembly of Women*, tr. by Robert Mayhew (Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, 1997), p. 33.

18. Xenophon, *Assembly of Women*, *op. cit.*, p. 80-84.

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he would have been more attracted to Aristophanes' communism of property for the mass of citizens rather than for the elites, possibly as a safeguard against luxurious living and exorbitant budgets for territorial expansion and war. If Plato's Socrates is credible, it is because the frugality of the elites is the only fit medicine for a sick city. As Xenophon notes, temperance for Socrates is the foundation of all virtue, from which it follows that there can be no relief for his sick producers without the frugality of Plato's elites. As Julia Annas observes, "being a good Guardian involves such stringent conditions of life that later at 399e Socrates comments that they have in the process 'purged' the luxurious and inflamed city with which they began."[19] But for how long? Just as his ideal city degenerates by becoming fevered, so the medicine contrived to abet the fever is not strong enough to cure it altogether. The fever abates, but later returns in a form no medicines can cure.

Thanks to the wisdom of the philosopher-kings and the courage of the guardian-warriors, temperance becomes an attribute of the superior orders or classes in Socrates' feverish and bloated city. But this virtue is not restricted to them. Because of the art of governing in the sick city, the producers, tradesmen or craftsmen are educated, trained, and compelled to moderate their excessive appetites for luxuries. Thus, the unnecessary appetites and those that do harm, both of which Socrates characterizes as "expensive" as opposed to "frugal," are wiped out.

The irony is that this second city is nonetheless bloated and overpopulated. Having destroyed the land by excessive grazing in the production of meat, and having expanded its boundaries at the expense of its neighbors, it continues to be threatened by war and pillage. The advantage of the first or germinal city is that it escapes these troubles and has no need to support the two unproductive classes of guardian-warriors and philosopher-kings. It enjoys the benefits of the second city without its burdens. It has no need for the art of governing and defense.

Socrates acknowledges only two of the cardinal virtues in his city of pigs: *justice*, because each citizen minds his own trade and does not interfere in that of others; and *temperance*, because there are no luxuries that might tempt one to excess. Is there, then, no place for wisdom and courage in his ideal city?

According to Socrates' maxim "know thyself," *wisdom* is not knowledge of the world, but rather self-knowledge. Such is the knowledge that befits the self, bodily health through control of the appetites, i.e., self control. *Courage* is not merely control over the urge to flee in the face of danger. As defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, cowardice is excessive fear of not only danger, but also pain and difficulty. In effect, the most general definition of courage is strength of character — the strength to resist a life of ease and the tyranny of passion. Thus, wisdom and courage lead to temperance. Unlike the feverish city in which wisdom and courage are the virtues exclusively of the elites, they are shared by all citizens in Socrates' *Walden*.

19. Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 77.

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What is Radical Orthodoxy?

John Hughes and Matthew Bullimore

Geneses

Radical orthodoxy is not exactly a movement or an ideology. Like any serious political and academic endeavor, it is characterized by a lack of homogeneity among its proponents. It refuses to prescribe answers, and so sustains a certain open-endedness. As a loose association of the like-minded, it can be seen as a common project, both in terms of its origins and its shared concerns.

Radical orthodoxy emerged as an academic intervention into what its proponents saw as a stale theological and philosophical environment. However, it is not a voice from nowhere. It has its roots in the Cambridge theological tradition, with its strongly philosophical emphasis (as opposed to purely systematic or ploddingly biblical approaches). This tradition was shaped by such diverse currents as the Anglican pacifist philosophy of Donald MacKinnon; the postmodern forays of Don Cupitt; the revisionary Thomism of Nicholas Lash; and the work of the current Archbishop of Wales, Rowan Williams, which mixes (among other things) the radical politics of Gillian Rose's Hegel and the conservative patristic and medieval theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Who are the proponents of radical orthodoxy? John Milbank, a pugnacious philosophical theologian, now a professor in Virginia, schooled in intellectual history, who gave up studying for the Anglican priesthood when his tutor, Rowan Williams, persuaded him that his calling was to an academic ministry. Williams also introduced him to Balthasar's work, whose Christian orthodoxy Milbank found refreshingly akin to postmodern critiques of secular modernity, and yet as providing an opening to be strangely more critical. Milbank's major work develops a critique of the violence inherent in modernity's secular social theories by blending the voices of Alasdair MacIntyre, Gilles Deleuze, Friedrich Nietzsche and St.Augustine.[1] While at Cambridge, Milbank met Graham Ward, a soft-spoken priest from Manchester, with a background in literary criticism and a doctoral dissertation that suggested likenesses between poststructural linguistics (Derrida) and an orthodox Christian theology of revelation (Karl Barth). In the early 1990s, Milbank spotted Catherine Pickstock, a doctoral student in liturgy with an interest in philosophy and radical politics, whose first book developed a startling critique of Derrida's reading

1. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

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of the *Phaedrus*, as a critique of the non-liturgical politics of modernity.[2]

Along with other sympathetic theological voices and some of their students, in 1999 these three issued an academic manifesto that proclaimed the bankruptcy of the secular and the urgent necessity of the return of the theological afresh.[3] The ripples it caused spanned the Anglo-American theological establishment, provoking both vicious and sympathetic reactions, but never luke-warm and, unfortunately, rarely intelligent.

The "Difference" of Radical Orthodoxy

As indicated by its very name, radical orthodoxy, they insist that only Christian orthodoxy is truly radical. For only here can the root of secularity be reached (after all, it is nothing other than Christian heresy). The unwillingness to ignore paradox allows for a slipperiness, which makes radical orthodoxy difficult to categorize in terms of contemporary positions, be they philosophical, political, or theological, and thus leaves it open to hostility from opposing camps. Liberal theologians object to their obstinate conservatism; while conservative theologians bewail their fraternization with the dangerous continental *rive gauche.*

Is this then just the typical grey fudging characteristic of non-offensive and compromising Anglicans? Radical orthodoxy proclaims that theological mediation, rather than mere positivism or crude dialectics, is the only critical position — a conviction instantiated in their unapologetic rhetoric of critique and persuasion. This rhetorical strategy is employed to proclaim their common convictions regarding: 1) the diagnosis of modernity/postmodernity; 2) philosophical dualisms; 3) radical politics; and 4) the Christian theological tradition.

These convictions are as follows:

1) Is the project modern or postmodern? Or, in terms of philosophy, is it more indebted to Descartes or Nietzsche? Perhaps neither, because it is critical of "modernists" employing "postmodernist" arguments. Yet, the proponents of radical orthodoxy are not simply postmodernists in the usual sense, because ultimately they regard postmodernism to be merely an undesirable intensification of modernism, with all the same problems. Likewise, the project could not be categorized as either naive realism or anti-realism, either crude rationalism or anti-rationalism. Neither the obsession with order nor the celebration of chaos, neither absolute homogeneity nor arbitrary relativist flux, neither spurning of the flesh nor its orgiastic divinization will suffice. The modern and the postmodern are united in their secularity and capitalist logic.

2) Deconstructing "dualisms": Radical orthodoxy frequently employs a conscious strategy of resisting familiar modernist oppositions by seeking to expose their "secret" dialectical identity and common foundation. This is evident

2. Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing, On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

3. John Milbank *et al.*, *Radical Orthodoxy* (London: Routledge, 1999).

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particularly in its approach to the relation between reason and faith. Here, it rejects *both* the rational "proofs" of theism, and blind fideism, *or* some sort of two-tier compromise that keeps them both hermetically sealed from one another, yet operating in parallel. If anything, this is *the* distinctive and original strategy of radical orthodoxy, which leads to its endlessly interdisciplinary "parasitic" style. This strategy is based on a rejection of the idea of the "secular," i.e., an inert, value-free realm of the *factum*, somehow imagined as subsisting outside of any relation to God, autonomous and self-defining. Instead, radical orthodoxy believes that *everything* that exists mediates transcendence and always exceeds itself. This is not, however, an original insight, but rather an attempt to think through the consequences of Henri De Lubac's revolutionary work, *A Brief Chatechesis on Nature and Grace.*[4] Nor could it be wholly original, for the project is *radical* in its commitment to the roots of the tradition. Yet, for it to be *orthodox* it has to proclaim the Christian *logos* anew, made strange once again. Thus, this antipathy to entrenched dualisms is further extended. For example, there is no dualism of body and soul; no priority of the modern subject or the pre-modern object; no possibility of the theocratic, for there can be no coercive *dominium* of the *ecclesia* over and above a semi-autonomous and manipulable extra-theological *saeculum.*

3) This rejection of the secular is motivated by a radical political concern manifest in a definite commitment to Christian socialism. But not the recent *pastiche* of socialism offered in England by the centralized, technocratic, Blairite "Third Way." Instead, this political concern is enhanced by a rediscovery of the organic and aesthetic dimension of social and political life through the vision of a liturgical *polis*, in the face of the dehumanizing processes of modern mechanization. A sustained critique of mainstream secular liberal political thought, with its language of formal democracy, rights, and property, underwriting the violence of capitalism, has characterized the project throughout.[5] This political radicalism rests on the adoption of two strategies: genealogical reconstruction, and the retrieval of a metaphysical vision alien to metaphysics in its decadent modern guise.

a) Genealogy: This historical and cultural approach provides a truly radical angle, yielding a more fundamental critique of the most basic assumptions usually taken for granted. Two genealogies are blended: the standard Left critique of the Cartesian legacy, and the Balthasar-influenced Catholic recognition that this critique must extend further back to the theological problems inherent in late medieval nominalism and voluntarism. Radical orthodoxy mourns the loss of the participatory metaphysics of Aquinas, which was abandoned in favor of the representational

4. Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1984).

5. This has more recently been extended by the attempts of Stephen Long and Daniel Bell, in the series of volumes under the banner of radical orthodoxy, to offer a friendly critique of liberation theology, where they deepen its theological and psychological sophistication and help prevent its collapse in the daunting face of the apparent global triumph of the market.

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account of language in William of Ockham, and the wilful God of Duns Scotus. The advent of nominalism and voluntarism opened up the horizons of the project of modernity, culminating in the Fichtean *ego*, the abyss of the Kantian *Ding-an-sich*, and the textual nihilism of poststructuralism — all of which inevitably dissolve into apolitical nihilistic construals of the world in their common denial of the theological. Radical orthodoxy offers instead, not a nostalgic romantic reaction, but a "resuming the thread" with the help of a counter-modern repressed romantic tradition. The patristic and medieval tradition is wedded to the best in Luther, Kierkegaard, the meta-critiques of Hamann and Jacobi, and the tradition of Christian socialism opened up in various ways by Coleridge, Maurice, and Newman.

b) Metaphysics: Radical orthodoxy is committed to philosophy after its rejection by postmodernists and pietists, so offering a more radical critique. This includes a rehabilitation of the Platonic legacy (which is seen to be not about dualism or totalitarian rationalism, but rather a mystic moral realism) and in particular its Christian form after Dionysius the Areopagite. This recovery of metaphysics emphasizes: the priority of *ekstasis* without loss in any authentic theological anthropology; apophaticism as a recognition of the transcendence of the divine and the objectifying hubris of any self-present account of rational meaning; participation as the key to an analogical understanding of the suspension of the material always from a donating transcendent source; and St.Augustine's theory of evil as the *privatio boni*, such that there can be no positivist or deterministic account of evil. Such doctrinal and philosophical renewal, however, cannot be regarded as a simple hankering after the lost Eden of the Middle Ages. Indeed, this theological cosmology is seen through the lens of the contemporary, radically linguistic worldview, offering a new rendering of the Christian narrative free from the essentialist problems of the pre-modern metaphysics of substance, and open to the ubiquity of the cultural in the present.

These genealogical and metaphysical strategies lead to:

4) A return to the Christian tradition, especially as embodied in the thought of St.Augustine, St.Gregory of Nyssa, St.Anselm, and St.Thomas Aquinas. The best of contemporary scholarship on such thinkers is combined with a respect for the living tradition that thus refuses a simple conservatism. Indeed, these thinkers are read in novel ways: thus, St.Augustine is seen as neither a proto-Cartesian, nor a Calvinist obsessed with sin, flesh, and fear; and St.Thomas does not appear as an Aristotelian rationalist whose theological preoccupations are subordinated to a philosophical starting point.

The Shape of a Non-Systematic "Systematics"

The radically orthodox approach to key Christian doctrines has yielded insights into traditional themes of Christian dogmatics. These insights form no mere descriptive encyclopaedic systematics, but follow from the political realization that theology must, to be theology, open the possibility of living a truly

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ethical life. Such insights include:

1. The Trinity: radical orthodoxy has assisted the recovery of the eastern concept of *epektasis* in which God is not to be seen as an infinite positive quantity, but as forever ecstatically giving more and more. This is a dynamic God of depths unknown, whose beauty makes a mockery of the sterile God of Scotus who marks the infinite point of extension within a univocity of being. Moreover, a "linguistic" interpretation of the Trinitarian relations occasions an emphasis on the temporal mediation and interpretation of the *logos*, now also embodied as *ecclesia*, back to the Father by the power of the in-dwelling Spirit. This is allied to a "relational substantive" model of Trinitarian personhood that subverts both a bland social Trinity and a now troubled ontology predicated on natures and substances. Finally, radical orthodoxy rejects a two-tier, immanent-economic Trinity, such that God is only as he presents himself in and through the cultural and material processes of life (in the sense in which Engels would render the material: social, political, economic, religious and economic). In short, God is cultural. Not reducible to culture, but only understandable through its mediations.

2. Christology: a "high" Christology of the cosmic Christ as *logos* is allied to the necessity of the particularity of the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, *this* Jesus Christ presents a unique scandal as *the* exception to human norms. Christ is the *homo sacer* rejected by all forms of the human *socius*, be it the Roman *imperium*, the Herodian tribal monarchy or the democratic mob. Christ's kingdom as first proclaimed is Other and opened through Christ's non-identical return in resurrection *despite* human sin. This returned body of Christ is transfigured and requires a thinking through of the dispersal and proliferation of the now various analogical bodies of Christ, and in so doing, subverts essentialism. The Church as the multi-gendered body of Christ is analogically related to individual, social and political bodies, and feeds on the eucharistic body of Christ. Responding to postmodern discussions of "lack," radical orthodoxy also provides a new interpretation of *kenosis* Christology. Here, the procession of the Son from the Father, and the Spirit from the Son and Father, opens up difference through an unqualified giving.

3. Atonement: Christ's "sacrifice" is seen as the end to all sacrifice, subverting a traditional logic of sacrifice in which a part is given up in *lieu* of the whole. Christ is returned as Christ, scarred but transfigured and whole. The scars only persist as a sign that evil has effects which are simply absurd. The scars are healed, for in God there is no evil or knowledge of evil. Instead, an ontological priority of the Good implies that evil is always reactionary, and good is always a continuation of what has always been (against all masochistic ethical systems, be they liberal or Levinasian).

4. Ethics: a radical ethical vision has been a constant component of the project of radical orthodoxy, emphasizing resurrection over and above either the positivism of death (as in Blanchot and Derrida) or a secular vitalism (as found within liberal discourses). Beauty and the particular are set against the empty

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legal universalism of the Kantian legacy; similarly, *eros* and *agape* are set over and against either Kant's notion of duty or the place of the accusation of the wholly Other in the Levinasian and Derridean tradition. Yet, radical orthodoxy does not replace these concepts with a Left-bank dandyism, nor does it have recourse to a postmodern fascination, after Bataille, with a Dionysian abandonment to a chaotic flux now read as "festival." Instead, radical orthodoxy has sought to point toward a joyful socialism based on the freely-given gift, against so many theologies that have sought to hypostasize a notion of the tragic. Ethics stands at the center of the project, for here the political, the social, and the aesthetic all coalesce theologically.

5. Ecclesiology: following Stanley Hauerwas, the Church is seen as both intrinsically political and ethical. The Church is part of a narrative that uniquely seeks peacefulness and refuses coercion. The Church must use persuasion and innate credibility to present itself in a postmodern market-place, standing or falling on how beautifully it narrates itself. With the collapse of the rational justification of any meta-narrative, theology, *like any other discourse*, can only present itself persuasively. Unlike any other discourse, however, theology has at its heart an ontology of peace. Only theology can truly subsume difference without either exalting the same or hypostasizing otherness and difference. It does this by providing the spatio-temporal analogy of a musical consensus (after St.Augustine) in which difference is harmoniously related through time. This peaceable kingdom subverts the violence of other discursive articulations and, following the traditional convertibility of the classical transcendentals, the most beautiful vision is, of course, also the most truly good.

6. Eucharist: radical orthodoxy has developed a sacramental semiotics, and this is essential as it informs and lies at the heart of Christian practice. In the performance of the eucharistic mysteries, Christ promises that this bread is his body, and that this cup is filled with his blood. Belief in this reference allows for a faith in all representation. However, this is a semiotics with depth that embraces presence and absence. God is at once the God that draws near in the eucharist, satisfying man's desire, and the God whose apparent absence is a drawing away that opens up the space of relation and provokes further desire.

7. Eschatology: ends remain as problematic as beginnings in much recent philosophy and critical theory. Radical orthodoxy does not espouse the utopian dialectics of Marx or Hegel, or an existentialist absolutizing of the present moment, or the *ennui* of Beckett's eternally unfulfilled *Waiting for Godot.* Instead, it seeks to think a partially realized eschatology, which always exceeds prediction. It works within the purview of a determinate end that will come but is still not yet, and so must be constantly re-imagined. The resurrection of the body remains central to the radically orthodox vision, for here is found the irreducibility of the particular within the realization of perfect community, and also the retention of transfigured materiality in all its depth as that originally created as good. Radical

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orthodoxy holds to the hope of *apocatastasis*, in which all is eventually redeemed. With eschatological community comes the prayer for and prayers of the dead, the inter-relation of the analogically co-extensive bodies of the Church, the inter-twining of the eternal and the temporal (where the latter, as suffused with a dynamic ethical "density," is, after all, simply the image of the eternal).

Future

As Christian practice, radical orthodoxy is an ongoing project. It is also relatively new, as are the projects of the main proponents. In time it will pass away as new and stranger practices of the Christian *logos* further those practices that attempt now, with integrity and vitality, to live theologically. The reception of radical orthodoxy is also ongoing. Radical orthodoxy has injected new life into theological debates, attracting criticisms from liberals and conservatives, from modern realists and apparently postmodern non-realists. It has, however, also attracted the interest of others seeking a way out of the postmodern impasse that infects the present. Radical orthodoxy has used and furthered the insights gleaned from so many other currents of thought, and can only gain from an active engagement with other projects. Despite its sometimes rhetorical belligerence, it proclaims no hubristic ownership of truth. It is to be hoped that radical orthodoxy may again reinvent itself in relation to other projects that seek a rejection of the secular, and by so doing remain faithful to the logic of the Christian *logos*.

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Soccer: From Ecstasy To Nightmare[1]

Jean-Marie Brohm and Marc Perelman

Four years ago, there was an explosion of historical ecstasy over the French victory in the World Cup: delirious crowds on the Champs-Elysées, fireworks, celebrating crowds of fans and intellectuals glued to their TV screens, journalists, shaken with happiness. Literally colonized by the magic passes, the fabulous shots, the hallucinating dribbles, everyone seemed intoxicated by the divine smoke of the opium of sports.

Totally taken over by a *black-blanc-beur* [including many ethnic players] team which imagined itself to be representing "multicultural France" — that of all colors — the youth were seduced by demagogues who confused common sense with soccer nonsense. From the smallest village to the center of the state, the identification was total. It was as if people were competing in congratulating, embracing, and kissing each other. Some even spoke of a "national orgasm!" An unprecedented *ola!* had submerged France, to the point that some dared to compare this populist outburst with the joy of the Liberation of Paris. Others went even further, evoking glorious reminiscences of the French revolution.

Thanks to this French team, in 1998 integration was finally under way, symbolically, politically, socially, and even economically — all at the same time. Integration, which worked so well on the field, could consequently be achieved by its simple transposition to civil society, its factories, schools and, of course, the suburbs. The French team's "exemplary" victory and the suggested fraternal virtues of soccer erased all remaining opposition to integration. Among intellectuals, who had generally supported the Left, there were many, including those on the Far Left, who, because of the "rediscovered national unity," let themselves be taken over by the lyric illusion of a France free of racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism.

The French team, promoted to the position of the ambassador of "the country of human rights," would remove the last opposition with its simple multicolor existence and its ability to exemplify the new winning economy *à la française*. Systematically articulated by the Left as a major political theme, this illusory integration through sport was, however, one of those smokescreens concealing the real disaster: the lack of a future for a youth condemned to urban violence, marginality, unemployment, and welfare benefits.

Thus, integration through soccer was the opium for the people that the Left

1. Originally published as "Football: de l'extase au cauchemar," in *Le Monde* (June 18, 2002). Translated by Julia Kostova.

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continued to dispense up to the match France-Algeria on October 6, 2001, which, although planned for a long time, ended up as a real fiasco: there was plenty of whistling during *La Marseillaise*, projectiles were thrown at state representatives (Elizabeth Guigou and Marie-George Buffet were hit, while Jospin remained stone-faced) and the field was invaded by suburban youngsters, most of them sons of immigrants, to prevent an impending humiliation when the French team was about to crush the Algerian team in a burst of energy. During this encounter, soccer revived the worst memories. The reopening of the wounds left by the Algerian war gave a bitter taste to an event which was supposed to be "friendly," and which the Left had projected as a "reconciliation" between the two nations. Then, soccer, and nothing else, i.e., the reality of its antagonistic logic — the defeat of one and the victory of the other, the insult of the losers (the poor) and the winners' (the rich) open arrogance — unleashed the excesses of the deceived fans. Despite the organizers' soothing declarations, those excesses could have had more dramatic consequences had the crowd gotten out of control, as is often the case in stadiums around the world.

The myth of soccer as a means of integration died that very same day, owing to the ruthless reality of sport competition. Supposedly an indicator of "friendship among nations," soccer became a vector of the generalized social disintegration: accepted, even if not provoked, verbal and psychological abuse, adherence to non-democratic values (warring ethos, vengefulness, easy money, blind adulation of idols involved in using illegal drugs), exacerbated chauvinism, the disappearance of all values of solidarity, hatred of the adversary, etc., marked the emergence of a new order imposed on the whole population.

But the facts are more convincing. For the past several years, deadly violence in the stadiums, galloping corruption in a growing number of countries (Brazil, Russia, China), growing use of illegal drugs (in Italy and elsewhere), the fixing of matches, and, above all, the regular shenanigans of hooligans all over the world, particularly in Europe, finally revealed the true face of the soccer empire: a multinational with false consciousness, a degrading populist enterprise, an ideological justification for social violence against the disinherited.

In France, in Seine-Saint-Denis, where soccer was presented as the privileged means of integration (along with the Stade de France as its emblem), matches were suspended for several weeks because of growing violence among the youth who came to fight. Once again, it was soccer and nothing else that bred violence and new forms of ghettoization in the suburbs, resulting in the sociocultural degeneration of soccer, which had become a fictitious "social escalator" for the young sons of immigrants.

Four years went by. All Left analyses broke down with the "historical defeat" of the French team. Politically, today the Left is completely destroyed, the popular classes are disoriented and without political representation, while the National Front remains a real menace. One of the Socialist and the Communist

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parties' preferred themes — integration through sport — has been literally pulverized by the growing popularity of national populism: soccer partakes of the ideological legitimation of the National Front and, more generally, of the Right of the Right, which keeps trying to attract an electorate gangrened by this emotional disease, with the only possible imaginary escape being the real social marginalization of "those below."

Thus, soccer has generated the opposite of what it pretended to bring about. By melting actual social relations (social inequality, unemployment, exploitation) into an artificial solidarity ("all supporters") and by concealing the real political drifts (liberal deregulation, privatization, market dictatorship) behind an illusory national community ("we won"), soccer has contributed to the Lepenization of the spirit.

Bothersome parallel phenomena: the resurgence of interest in soccer has gone hand in hand with the rise of the National Front, which has managed to attract young voters by recycling the nationalist ideology of the 1998 victory: warring spirit, intensified chauvinist propaganda, the cult of the uniform (all in blue, all behind the chief or the totem), order and discipline, national populist aggregation. Thus, soccer has become a source of support for the National Front, as the National Front relies on real soccer values to grow: the myth of the superman, the ideology of sport war, the justification of physical force, the twilight aesthetics of the gesture and of the domain of sport, fanaticism. Yet, the French team disappeared miserably from competition. The foolishness concerning the "soccer culture," which has been scrutinized a thousand times, the mystification of "togetherness," and the politically correct dreams of sport multiculturalism precipitated by the 1998 victory collapsed like a ridiculous house of cards.

In the December 1, 2001 issue of *Le Monde*, its director, Jean-Marie Colombani, wanted to announce the beautiful news: "The dream machine will be launched." The broken dreams of the France in blue was about to be transformed into a nightmare, with a kind of rampant soccer Lepenization. Lastly, one of the National Republican Movement henchmen, Jean-Yves Le Gallon, concluded that "the humiliating and ridiculous counter-performance of the French team is the kiss of death for the immigrationist propaganda that broke loose at the 98 World Cup." The first images of a Zidane, rolling on the ground, his head buried in the grass, may be the first indications of the worst yet to come. . . .

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